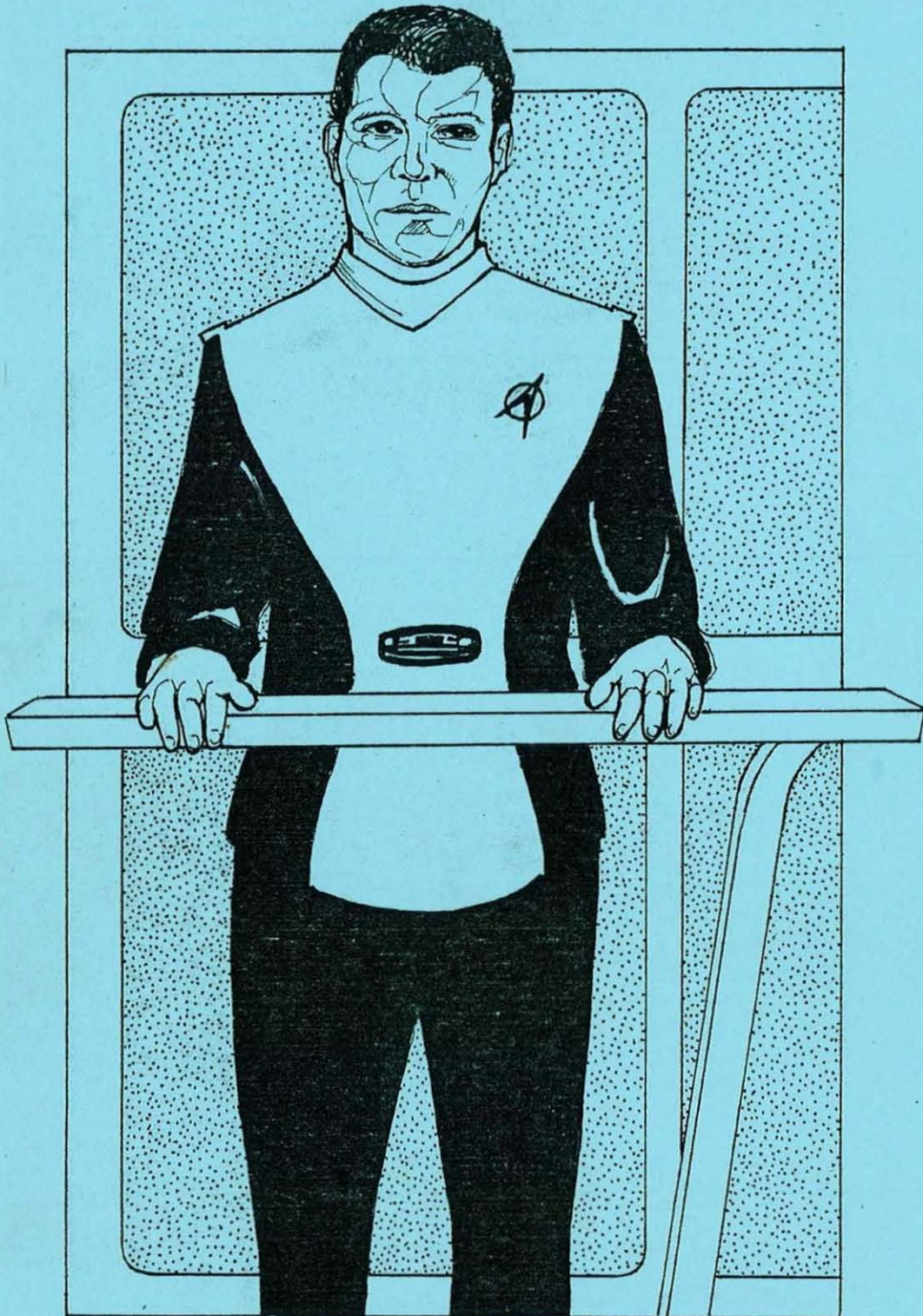




ENTERPRISE - LOG ENTRIES

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ScoTpress - Sheila Clark, Valerie Piacentini, Janet Quarton & Shona

Hello, everyone, and welcome to the new length ENTERPRISE - LOG ENTRIES 66. After some discussion, we decided that we preferred the longer length issues, and - although it is of course twice the price - those of you who commented on the longer length seemed to prefer it too. Now all we need are a few novels around 100 pages...

Seriously, what this new length also means is that we are now better able to handle stories in the previously-difficult length of 35 - 45 pages. These stories were really too short to print on their own, but at the same time took up an unfair amount of space in a 50-page zine. We can now feature a story of this length in a LOG ENTRIES, and we'll be starting to do this in E-LE 67 with THE RAGS OF TIME By Dolores Gordon-Smith. A top-secret machine which the Enterprise is transporting mysteriously disappears when the ship is close to Romulan space; the Enterprise loses touch with Starfleet; and the Romulans are there, less than friendly...

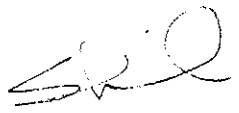
E-LE 67 will also see the editorship of LOG ENTRIES returning to Valerie, although we'll probably be sharing the typing. Janet and I finally won, and succeeded in persuading her that a computer for word-processing really *is* a good idea. As I type this, she's still 'trying her wings', so to speak, with the computer, practising and experimenting - Janet and I both got our wings stretched on Spectrums, which were no use for producing zines but which *did* have a reasonable word-processing programme for writing letters.

E-LE 67 will also include THE IRISH VAMPIRE by David Gomm, a direct sequel to THE SERPENTS OF PAXO BETA in this issue - a continuation of his series featuring D.S.O. Kinshaw of the U.S.S. Enterprise.

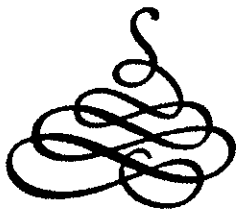
As well as our regular writers, this time we have two new writers and a new poet, in Christine Maybank, Helen Davison and M. Frost - we hope to see more work by them in the future. Overseas is represented by Lyn Viviers (South Africa) and Sheryl Peterson (Australia), as well as Marilena Maiocco (also new to our pages), a really talented artist who lives in Italy, and Karen Hayden, who is currently living in Germany, where her husband is stationed. Without our contributors we would have no LOG ENTRIES; we welcome submissions - even if you haven't had anything printed anywhere, we're willing to consider your work. Even if you live outside Britain, that's no problem; we welcome foreign contributors too. What we don't want is anything concerning the death of any of the main characters, stories about the crews of other ships (these are, after all, 'The voyages of the Starship Enterprise...'), stories based on ST2 or 3, or K/S. Submissions can be sent to either -

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in the YEAR of the DRAGON

by

JANICE PITKETHLEY

The sun blazed down on the hot sands of the Sas-a-Shar as Spock followed his father along the dusty track. Neither spoke, but Spock's thoughts were busy, wondering why Sarek had brought him to this place.

His questions were partly answered when they entered the arena where the ceremony of bonding had taken place seven years ago. Sarek motioned for him to be seated and he looked around with a great sense of curiosity. The ancient stones looked foreboding, somehow, almost sinister as the wind-chimes tinkled softly in the hot breeze.

"I sense your thoughts. You are wondering why I have brought you here." Sarek's voice broke the silence.

"Yes, Father."

"You have reached your fourteenth year," he continued. "It is my duty as a Vulcan to instruct you further in Vulcan philosophy."

Spock's curiosity grew even stronger as Sarek approached one of the ancient stones. He touched one of the engraved symbols and part of the stone slid back, to reveal a hollow compartment. From this he took a large covered object and laid it on the sand at Spock's feet.

The wrappings fell away and Spock found himself staring at a formidable weapon. It had a curved blade at one end and widened to a club-shaped base.

"It is called a lirpa, the oldest of Vulcan weapons. I am about to instruct you in the art of Shai-Shon; Vulcan combat."

"... But why, Father? That is in contrast to our Vulcan belief in peace - "

"Shai-Shon is an ancient Vulcan ritual and comes down from the Time of the Beginning. It is essential that every Vulcan male is highly proficient in its skills."

Spock knew not to question his father at the present time. He observed closely as Sarek demonstrated the correct method of holding the lirpa. When it came to his turn, he found the weapon so heavy that he could hardly raise it from the ground.

He jumped back, startled, as the blade whistled through the air, barely missing him.

"Your reactions are fast. That is good," Sarek commented. "It is your turn now. Attack me with the lirpa."

Spock swung the heavy weapon, only to discover that Sarek was no

longer there.

"Try again... " The voice came from behind him.

The instruction continued, Sarek showing his young son the methods of attack and defence. It took Spock some time to get used to the feel of the lirpa, but he was an apt pupil. The session ended when he succeeded in knocking Sarek to the ground.

"Father - are you hurt?" Spock dropped the weapon.

"I am quite unharmed." Sarek brushed the sand from his clothes. "Well done, Spock. Your actions were fast, and caught me off guard. Come, rest for a moment, then we shall return home."

They sat on one of the stone slabs at the edge of the arena. Spock kicked the sand with the toe of his boot until Sarek's disapproving look told him to stop.

"You have too many thoughts." Their eyes met. "Tell me."

"Father, I wish to know the reason and purpose of this... Shai-Shon. It seems barbaric... "

Sarek did not answer straight away. Instead, he replaced the lirpas in their compartments before speaking again.

"You are growing up, Spock, and there are many new things to be learned as you grow to adulthood. In this place of Koon-ut-Kal-if-fee you were bonded to T'Pring, and it is here that the marriage ceremony will take place - "

"Yes, but - "

"Do not interrupt. T'Pring may challenge you. It is her right. In the event of a challenge, T'Pring will choose her champion, and you will have to fight for her. That is why you must learn the skills of Shai-Shon."

Spock's mind still seethed with unspoken questions. He tried to ask his father on the way home, but Sarek silenced him with the command, "Come to my study tonight."

Amanda sighed as she looked at the closed door. The hour was late, and her husband and son had been in the study for hours now. She knew what Vulcans were like once they started a discussion, and hoped that Sarek would not keep Spock up too late.

Spock was still listening to his father. During the last few hours, they had discussed many subjects and Sarek answered all his questions. Spock was now a much wiser Vulcan...

They continued to talk until Sarek noticed the hour. "We shall continue this discussion at a later date. You are excused from attending school until your special instruction is complete. Come now."

Spock left the study and went to his room. Sleep came quickly despite the events of the day and the thoughts whirling around in his head. The knowledge he now possessed seemed awesome, even frightening.

Next day Sarek took him to the arena again. They practiced with the

lirpas until Spock became adept at handling the Vulcan weapons. He had to be, as Sarek did not hold back in any way. More than once Spock had his clothes slashed by the lirpa's flashing blade. He failed to be fast enough on one occasion and the blade cut his arm slightly. That taught him to be faster in his reactions. Sarek was pleased with his progress.

The lectures also continued. Spock listened to his father, listened to tapes, and Sarek guided him through the different stages of the mind-meld, taking him to deeper levels than he had ever been before. Through the meld, Spock saw some of his father's past...

"Your instruction is almost complete," Sarek informed him a few nights later. "I can tell you no more. You are fully prepared in Vulcan Philosophy as you grow to maturity."

"Yes, Father."

"We shall continue the Shai-Shon training for some time." Sarek dismissed him.

Spock went to his room that night with a vague feeling of unease. It was not logical, but still the feeling persisted. Then things changed...

At the next training session in the arena, Spock had to fight like he had never done before to avoid Sarek's hard and fast attacks. It had almost become a battle for survival! Spock was no match for his father's superior strength and experience. Just as he felt he could take no more, Sarek stopped abruptly and laid down the lirpa. He shook his head as if trying to clear his senses, the light of intensity fading from his eyes.

"Are you harmed, my son?" he asked Spock.

"I am... unharmed, Father, but I had to use all the skills you taught me to defend myself."

"Forgive me."

Spock did not know what to say at his father's apology; the event was rare indeed. To cover his confusion, he hastened to replace the lirpas in their compartments, noting that Sarek could not stop the tremors which suddenly shook him.

"Father... " Spock took a step forwards.

"Do not touch me!" Sarek issued the sharp command.

More confused than ever, Spock turned away until Sarek had full control of himself once more.

They were silent on the way home, the atmosphere tense. Once, Spock stumbled on the uneven ground, and brushed against Sarek. A bolt of lightning crashed through his mind and he fell to his knees on the stony pathway.

"I am unable to assist you." Spock heard Sarek's voice through the swirling mists. Slowly his mind began to clear.

"What happened?"

"You touched me. The contact was sufficient for my thoughts and feelings to pass between us."

"The mind touch was never like that before." Spock passed his hand across his eyes. Sarek did not answer.

They travelled some distance before he stopped and turned to face Spock. "Have you not retained the knowledge I imparted to you? Have you forgotten our discussion of three nights ago?"

Spock's eyes widened as realisation began to dawn. "Father, I... " The words would not come at first. "You told me about... Vulcan biology. Is... that... what is happening to you?"

"Yes, Spock," Sarek said heavily. "It is the pon farr. I knew this would happen, and you are old enough to be told. Without information, your thoughts would be confused at the changes in me. I could have killed you in the arena... "

Spock was silent, awed by the information he had just been given. They did not speak again until they reached home, Sarek warning Spock not to mention the subject.

During the next few days, he did not see very much of his father; Sarek remained in his own apartments or his study. Then one night he sent for Spock.

"Come," the deep voice answered his knock. Somewhat apprehensive, Spock entered the study. He noticed at once the change in his father; Sarek hid his hands behind his back, but could not disguise the look in his eyes. Spock gave an involuntary shudder as he met the burning gaze. Sarek's eyes reminded him of the dragons he had seen in the books of Earth legend... glowing like burning embers...

"You wished to see me, Father?" he said at last.

"Yes." Sarek motioned for him to be seated. "You will go and stay with your grandparents. Suval will be here for you tomorrow."

"Yes, Father." Spock eyes were downcast.

"Spock... " Sarek's voice was strangely gentle. "You do not understand. I have had the logic taken from me. I sense your thoughts; you think this is barbaric." Spock remained silent, staring at the floor. "Come here."

This time Spock could not ignore his father's command. Sarek placed his fingers on Spock's temples. The meld was light, but Spock recoiled at the irrational, illogical thoughts radiating from the normally tranquil mind.

"I understand, Father," he said at last.

"Go now, Spock." Sarek held up his hand, fingers parted in the Vulcan salute.

Spock returned the hand sign and withdrew. He went to his room and began packing a few items into a small case. Darkness came and the house seemed even more silent and foreboding. As time went on, he realized that there had not been any call to dinner that night. Not that he cared - he felt too upset to eat. It was illogical, but the fact remained.

Next morning, Spock woke very early. The sun was just beginning to rise above the horizon. Time crept by on leaden feet, every minute seeming like an hour to the young Vulcan. At last he heard the whine of the descending aircar.

Suval stopped the engines and looked at his grandson standing there, case in hand. Spock did not board the aircar immediately; instead, he produced a strange clicking whistle, then Suval saw the large shaggy animal lumbering across the garden.

"Grandfather, I cannot leave I-Chaya with no-one to look after him... "

Suval's eyebrows rose. "Indeed? Very well, he may go with us."

I-Chaya needed no second bidding! He jumped into the back of the aircar and watched anxiously as Spock climbed in too.

Spock looked down with mixed feelings as the aircar rose above the house.

"Your thoughts are illogical." Suval broke the silence as the aircar gathered speed.

"Forgive me." Spock stared unseeing as the buildings flashed past.

T'Pau came to meet the arriving aircar and frowned in disapproval as she saw the sehlat in the back. "Why have you brought this creature with you?" she asked with disdain.

"There is no-one to look after him at home. He will be no trouble," Spock defended I-Chaya.

"See that he does not approach the house." T'Pau still looked disapproving as the sehlat began to explore his new surroundings.

Spock picked up his case and followed his grandparents into the house. "This will be your room." T'Pau opened a door in the upper hallway.

"Yes, Grandmother." Spock put the case down on the bed and began to unpack his few possessions. Left alone now, he looked around the simply furnished bedroom, then crossed to the window. It looked down on the rear garden, where I-Chaya lay in a patch of shade.

At least you feel at home here, Spock thought as he saw the already sleeping animal.

Time passed very slowly in the unfamiliar surroundings, the afternoon seeming like a week to Spock. Finally the shadows began to lengthen, heralding the approach of nightfall.

Suval stopped reading and laid the book aside as he heard the footsteps in the hallway. "Come in, Spock," he called through the open doorway.

As Spock entered the study, Suval noticed for the first time his grandson's height, which was above average for a Vulcan of his years.

"My home is yours. You may go where you wish here. Do you require anything of me?"

"No, grandfather... "

Suval's eyebrows rose slightly. "Your thoughts are still confused. These are illogical traits, Spock."

"I ask forgiveness."

Suval's features relaxed slightly as he looked at his grandson. "You

have learned many new things in the past few weeks. I understand Sarek was giving you further instruction as befitted your fourteenth year."

"Affirmative." Spock knew that his grandfather was about to begin a discussion. Many times he had listened to Suval's teaching on Vulcan Philosophy, gaining knowledge from his long years of wisdom.

"Sarek had his duty to carry out. He has trained you well to your Vulcan heritage," Suval continued. "You are growing into a fine young Vulcan, both in stature and intelligence. Do you wish to discuss the matter further?"

"Father instructed me not to speak of the subject," Spock answered doubtfully.

"You must not discuss the matter with strangers. I am of the immediate Family and your own father's guide and counsellor." Suval began to ask questions, gently probing into Spock's knowledge of Vulcan life and philosophy. "Sarek has trained you fully. You have no further need of any instruction," Suval concluded.

They talked on, only stopping when T'Pau entered the study with a tray and a jug of the fragrant tea which was highly prized on Vulcan. She did not speak and withdrew, leaving Suval and Spock to resume their discussion.

"You have changed a great deal since the last occasion when you stayed with us." Suval poured the fragrant liquid into his cup and passed the jug to Spock. Spock looked at his grandfather and almost dropped the jug. Vague memories began to return... memories of himself as a small boy, confused and lost. He remembered the stern T'Pau and Suval reprimanding him for allowing emotion to be read from his features, and being taken away from home without any explanation.

"Yes, Spock. You recall you were here before." Suval lifted one eyebrow. "We had much difficulty with you then as your Human half sometimes became the dominant side."

"I do not recall clearly. I was a child then..." A faint greenish tinge passed over Spock's features then vanished.

"You were almost in your seventh year and too young to be given the information you now possess. I recall you kept asking to go home. One day you disappeared and after a search, we found you almost half-way across ShiKahr, walking towards home."

"I remember my illogical actions, grandfather," Spock replied quietly.

"Tell me about Shai-Shon training." Suval refilled his cup once more. He listened as Spock described the training sessions in the arena. Finally Spock hesitated and stopped, not sure if he could tell his grandfather of the last occasion.

"There is more. Continue," Suval ordered.

"I was in danger of my life. Father seemed to be unaware of his actions."

"An unfortunately incident, but understandable. Were you harmed?"

"No," Spock replied slowly. "Grandfather... may I ask you a question?"

"Affirmative. I will answer it if I can."

"I could not discuss it with Father... I have a distinct recollection that on the... last occasion similar to this one... that my father struck me... "

"He did, Spock. You were seven years younger then, and very inquisitive. You asked too many questions for which there could be no answer. Amanda sent you to us for your own safety. Sarek's actions were not logical; he had the logic and veneer of civilisation taken from him."

"I know. Last night he called me into the study and informed me that I would be coming to stay with you. He also melded and allowed me to touch his mind." Spock could not repress a shudder.

Silence fell between the two Vulcans, each busy with his own thoughts. After a while, Suval rose to his feet. "We have conversed for quite some time and the hour is late. Go to your room, Spock, and may you sleep well."

Spock returned the hand sign, and left the room.

He lay awake staring into the darkness. Although his body was tired, his mind remained clear and active. He tried to will himself to sleep but his mind would not respond. After a while he gave up the attempt.

Time passed and still Spock lay awake, the sky beginning to pale with the coming dawn. A tendril of thought crept into his mind, seeking entry, swirling and becoming stronger. Spock knew that this meant the beginning of a link; he sat up and waited for the contact...

It seared into his consciousness like an exploding missile, throwing him to the floor. He cried out as his entire person was engulfed in searing flame...

The cry aroused Suval from sleep. Immediately, he received mental distress calls from Spock and hurried along the hallway to his room, his eyes widening as he saw what was happening.

Spock thrashed around wildly on the floor, his hands tearing at the thin sleeping robe as if trying to rip it from him. "... Burning... help me... " he managed.

Suval grasped Spock's shoulders to hold him still and the sensation engulfed him as well. "Close your mind, Spock! You are linked to Sarek!"

"... Cannot... The link is too strong... " Spock began to struggle again, trying to get away from the pain which engulfed him. At once, Suval melded with his grandson, forcing back the stronger will and helping Spock to raise his mental barriers. At last the link was broken and Spock closed his eyes with a sigh.

During the struggle, T'Pau had stood in the doorway, silently watching the dramatic events. Suval withdrew the meld, becoming aware of her presence.

"Bring water," he commanded. T'Pau left to do his bidding. He helped Spock to sit up and held the glass to his lips, waiting for him to recover. "Leave us," he said to T'Pau as Spock opened his eyes.

"Grandfather... what happened?" Spock looked down at his torn robe.

"Sarek was thinking of you and you allowed him to mind link. Are you better now?"

"Yes, but... "

"What did you feel?" Suval interrupted.

"Flames... burning... I felt as if my garments had caught fire. The flames were consuming me..." Spock shuddered at the memory.

"Your telepathic powers are not fully developed yet, or you could have resisted the link." Suval crossed to the wall cabinet and took another sleeping robe from the shelf. Spock changed from the torn one, then watched as Suval closed the window shutters, keeping out the morning sun.

"You will require assistance for sleep to come to you." Spock felt the fingers touch his forehead, a great sense of peace and well-being enveloped his mind and he descended into darkness...

"Rest well, Spock." Suval withdrew his touch from Spock's forehead and left the room on silent feet.

Darkness had come again by the time Spock woke from a deep sleep. He felt rested and refreshed, his mind clear once more. Also, he realised, he was very hungry!

"We waited for you to awaken," Suval said when he came downstairs. T'Pau left to prepare the evening meal.

"I forgot about I-Chaya!" Spock exclaimed when they had finished.

"I gave him the required sustenance," Suval informed him.

"Thank you, grandfather.

T'Pau's chin lifted at the mention of the sehlat and for a moment Spock thought that she was about to sniff in disapproval, as he had seen his mother do on occasion. Suval raised one eyebrow as he caught the illogical thought.

"May I go out for a moment?" Spock asked. Suval nodded assent and watched as Spock left the room.

I-Chaya ran to greet his young friend, almost knocking him down with his enthusiastic welcome. "I have not deserted you, old friend." Spock touched the huge furry head as I-Chaya placed one great paw on his knee and anxiously sniffed his face.

The following days passed without incident, save one. Spock was quietly reading when T'Pau marched into the main lounge. He knew by her still and rigid back that she was extremely displeased...

"That creature of yours! Come and see what he has done!"

She led Spock out into the back garden. What had once been a blaze of colour was now bare. I-Chaya had eaten all the flower heads.

On the fourteenth day, Suval called Spock into his study and gave him the news. "I have received a message to say that you may return home."

At once, Spock felt a rush of happiness, and banished it before it could be seen in his eyes. Once more he packed his few possessions. He still had to fight to control his feelings as the aircar sped towards home...

Sarek and Amanda were there to meet the aircar. Spock jumped out before the engines had stopped and almost ran towards his parents.

"Welcome home, Spock." Sarek gave the hand sign.

Suval watched as the three of them walked towards the house, Amanda's hand resting lightly on her son's shoulder. Raising one eyebrow he started the aircar's engines...

How good it felt to be back home again, Spock thought as he looked at the familiar surroundings.

Amanda sighed as she noticed them disappearing into the study, the door swishing closed. *Vulcans!* she thought, turning away.

Spock told Sarek about the mind link and how Suval had come to his assistance.

"I know. I could not prevent myself from thinking of you," Sarek said when he had finished. "Your will is not strong enough yet to break the link. It will strengthen as you grow older."

Father and son looked at each other as the sound of a long crooning howl reached their ears.

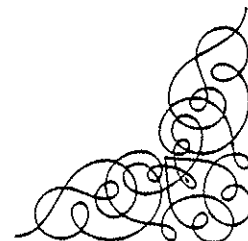
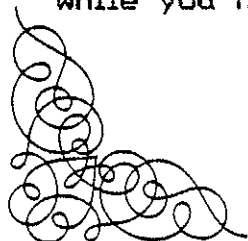
I-Chaya was also glad to be home...



Was I always waiting here for you?
Trapped in my icy wasteland
Banished by Zor Khan's devilry
To a lost and frozen past.
And in all those solitary years
When I struggled for survival,
Why, when the gods took pity
Was it you they sent at last?
With that fearful blizzard raging
What was it that drew me out there?
To find you crouched over your friend
Your faces white with snow.
The shock of Human contact -
The sound of other voices.
What such loneliness can mean
Surely you also know.
I led you to my cave
My mind churning with thoughts and questions.
That you could be evil and mean harm
- I did not even care.
But oh, the dawning wonder
When I first studied you clearly
And saw your snow-filled hair.
You had an air of brooding
Like some part of you was hidden.
Yet with what care and gentleness
Did you seek to tend your friend.

Your dark eyes seemed to see through me
In silent understanding
And all that I could think of was
Now loneliness would end.
All these things for which I'd yearned so much
- The sound of voices - breathing
The very presence of another -
It had been so long!
My joy gave way to terror
Thinking this at last was madness.
But you soothed me like a frightened child,
Your hands gentle yet strong.
Do you really blame me so much
That I wanted you to stay here?
And so I let you believe
What could well prove to be a lie.
I knew that I could not go back
- Death awaited through that portal.
Surely life was preferable even here
Than to try to leave and die.
You seemed resigned - I dared to hope.
Your friend recovered swiftly
Though you worried about another friend
Lost in another time.
The one you called McCoy argued
That you must try the portal.
You were torn, yet did not doubt my word.
A great peace came to my mind.
Was it loneliness that drew us
With that sudden, swift attraction?
Till it seemed we'd known each other
All our lives, not just bare hours.
It seemed natural to find myself
Held in your arms so safely.
Past and future did no more exist
- The present alone was ours.
You said I was more beautiful
Than all your dreams of beauty.
My cave became our shelter
From the world and all its woes.
Then McCoy told you that I had lied
And in anger you attacked him.
That seemed to prove something, somehow -
Uncertainty tore you so!
McCoy fled out into the storm
Swearing he'd go without you.
That he'd go back to his own kind
Though it could well mean his end.
You did not move for a long time,
Your head bowed as if in anguish.
I told you the truth - that I did not know.
Donning furs, we went after your friend.
We found him at the portal,
Staggering but still determined.
But the pathway through, we could not find.
It offered you no way.
Would you have stayed here with me
In eternal isolation?
Was the choice ever yours, really?
Or did the gods just play?
The other friend you thought you'd lost
Called to you through the portal,
Like some dim ghost come from the past

To lure you both from me.
You hesitated, though you plainly
Loved that unseen speaker.
You cupped my face and searched my eyes.
Which one was it to be?
Then turning almost savagely
You thrust the Doctor forward
Crying, "You go ahead of me!
He must give me more time!"
But instead of passing through
McCoy slammed hard against the cliff face
And blinked uncomprehendingly.
The wall gave back no sign.
A sudden surge of hope
Rose in my throat, seeking to choke me.
Perhaps, after all, you could not go,
And I really had not lied.
Then the voice said you must go together
As you'd done to come here.
If you chose to stay, it would doom McCoy
- And my heart shrivelled and died.
I knew then that though I loved you
I must not seek to hold you.
I could not doom you to the loneliness
That had long been mine.
There were life, and love, and friends
Waiting to claim you through that portal.
If you stayed, and McCoy and I should die,
You'd be lonely for all time.
I stepped back then and looked at you,
To imprint you on my memory.
We both knew that I could not go.
There was no other choice.
McCoy clutched at your arm
Seeking to pull you to the portal
And an almost frantic urgency
Grew in that unseen voice.
I pulled free then and walked away.
It took all my strength to leave you
And not to run to you and beg you stay
No matter what the cost.
But your sense of duty was too strong.
You turned - gone in a moment
And I stood in the snow like a frightened child
For all eternity lost.
I will not even know if you are alive
When you step through the time portal
- If you will fall dead on the other side
Or be safely on your way.
Will you even remember what took place,
Or shall I be forgotten?
For I will have been dead five thousand years
While you have lived only a day.



the TROUBLE with TORTURE

by

CHRISTINE MAYBANK

James Kirk studied his surroundings in bewilderment. He was in a dimly-lit room which appeared to be empty of furnishings, except for the chair he was tied to by straps around his wrists and ankles.

He tried to remember the events leading up to his capture, but his mind was a complete blank. He had no idea of how long he'd been imprisoned, why he was being held, or by whom. He wasn't even certain if he had been alone at the time of his capture.

His thoughts turned to his ship and he wondered if the Enterprise and her crew were safe. He tried to recollect their last mission but it was as if all memories of recent events had been erased from his memory.

Frustration welled up inside him and he pulled at the bonds around his wrists with such force that the straps cut into the flesh, making blood appear. The straps did not give, but the pain from his wrists gave him something else to think about.

He heard a noise behind him and suddenly the room was illuminated with such brightness that he was momentarily blinded. When his vision cleared he looked up to see a Klingon disrupter aimed directly at his head. The Klingon slowly lowered the disrupter to his side, and went and stood directly in front of Kirk, who recognised him instantly.

"My dear Captain Koloth, how nice it is to see you again," he said sarcastically. "I hope you don't mind if I don't get up to greet you."

Koloth raised his head and laughed before returning Kirk's greeting. "My dear Captain Kirk. You never change, do you? But then I wouldn't want you to. I do hope you aren't finding my hospitality too uncomfortable."

"Not at all, Captain, not at all," Kirk replied. "In fact, it was nice of you to go to all this trouble on my behalf. To what do I owe the pleasure?"

"Why, information, of course, Captain Kirk. You possess certain information which is of great value to me; that is why you are here. I commend you for not succumbing to our methods of interrogation in the past, but I am confident of success this time."

Kirk looked around the room again, and realised that none of the apparatus usually connected with Klingon interrogation was present. In fact, the room was as empty as he had first deduced, except for a table he could now see in the corner. There were some artifacts on the table, but he couldn't make out what they were. He returned his gaze to Koloth and waited for the Klingon to make the next move.

"I see you are curious, Captain," he said. "Therefore I won't keep you in suspense any longer. The last time we met was over the incident

with Sherman's Planet and the quadrotriticale. Because of your actions on Space Station K-7, Kirk, we lost Sherman's Planet and I was disgraced in front of the whole Empire. The final insult though occurred when you transported all those... creatures... onto our vessel just as we warped out of orbit."

Koloth virtually spat the last words out. Gone was the mild banter; the Klingon was now openly hostile. He looked at Kirk, noticed the Captain's shudder and continued.

"I see I have got through to you at last, Kirk. Do you shudder at the prospect of what is about to happen to you, I wonder, or is it because you have the same loathing for those creatures as I have?"

"The information I require is quite simple. I want to know where I can find one Cyrano Jones, the fat little Human space-trader who infested the galaxy with his vermin."

He spun around and bent over Kirk until he was face to face with his captive. "Now, will you tell me what I want to know?"

Kirk stared at Koloth incredulously. Of all the information he had expected to be questioned about, he was being asked the whereabouts of Cyrano Jones! He couldn't believe that the Klingons had gone to so much trouble to capture him, were threatening to torture him, over Cyrano Jones and his tribbles! Despite the seriousness of the situation, Kirk began to laugh at the absurdity of it all.

"I am pleased you choose to remain silent, Captain," said Koloth, moving over to the table. "You see, I discovered that tribble fur makes an excellent instrument of torture and you have supplied me with an ideal opportunity to try out my invention."

He returned to Kirk with what could only be described as a tickling stick - which is just what it turned out to be. Koloth knelt down and removed Kirk's boots and socks, leaving his feet bare.

Kirk stared down at the Klingon in amazement. "I don't believe this. I just don't believe this is happening!" he exclaimed. "Koloth, you are completely insane!"

"You may be correct, Kirk. You have no idea at all what effect those creatures had on me. Now are you prepared to tell me where I can find Cyrano Jones?" he demanded, moving the tickling stick back and forth across Kirk's feet.

The Captain of the Enterprise curled up his toes in an attempt to stop the tickling. He pulled at the bonds restraining him, but he couldn't get free. The tickling intensified and he began to giggle. Soon, great guffaws of laughter were forthcoming. Tears streamed down his face and he was soon overcome by a stitch in his side. Eventually he could stand it no longer.

"Stop! Koloth, please stop! I'll talk! I'll tell you!" he pleaded between breaths. "You'll find Cyrano Jones on Space Station K-7. He's still there as far as I know, picking all the tribbles up. There, I've told you now, for goodness sake leave my feet alone. I can't take any more!" he yelled.

"Thank you, Captain Kirk," Koloth said, standing up. "I was confident that you would talk - sooner or later. Now that I have got the information I require, there is only one thing left for me to do. There is a Klingon proverb, Captain, which says that revenge is a dish best served cold, but in this case, revenge is best served furry. Goodbye, Captain Kirk - I

doubt if we will meet again." The Klingon crossed over to the table and pushed a lever in the wall.

Kirk, who was still trying to recover his composure, heard a noise above his head. Looking up, he saw a section of ceiling disappear, and to his horror tribbles galore began to fall down on him. Tribbles of all colours, shapes and sizes bounced off his head and shoulders, falling on to his lap and onto the surrounding floor. He screamed and pleaded with Koloth to stop, to close the hatch, but the Klingon just stood there and laughed. More and more tribbles fell down - he was being buried alive! He closed his eyes and screamed again and again. The tribbles made a dull thudding sound as they landed on his head and he finally felt himself falling down deeper and deeper into the blackness which reached out to claim him.

He felt strong hands grip his shoulders and begin to shake him. "No! No!" he screamed. "Get them off me! Take them away!"

The shaking intensified, and from a distance he heard his name being called, but he couldn't answer. Suddenly, a stinging blow to the side of his face cleared his head. He opened his eyes and looked wildly around.

He found himself on the floor of his cabin on the Enterprise, entangled in the sheets from his bunk. He looked up into the very concerned faces of Spock and McCoy.

"Jim, thank goodness," McCoy said, the relief evident in his voice. "I thought you were never going to wake up. Are you all right?"

"Yeah, Bones, I think so. Just a bit disorientated, that's all. What happened?"

"You had one hell of a nightmare, that's what happened," replied McCoy, helping Kirk back onto his bunk. "Gave Spock and me quite a fright too."

"Indeed, Captain," Spock continued. "I was most disturbed to hear laughter and then screams coming from your quarters. I enquired if you needed assistance, but when I received no reply I called Dr. McCoy and after overriding the locking mechanism on your door, we discovered you on the floor. I regret having to strike you, Jim, but we were unable to waken you any other way."

"That's okay, Spock," Kirk said, absently running a hand across his cheek. "I'm sorry for being such a nuisance, and I thank you both for coming to my assistance; that was certainly some dream I had." He shivered at the memory of Koloth and his weird chamber of horrors.

"Here, Jim, drink this." McCoy handed him a generous measure of Saurian brandy, which he downed in one go. "Do you feel up to talking about it?" he asked.

"Thanks all the same, Bones, perhaps tomorrow. I'll tell you all about it then and I promise you will find it quite amusing. Right now, all I want to do is have a refreshing shower and get back to bed."

"Okay, Jim, whatever you say. I'll see you in the morning."

"Captain, if you require anything at all, please do not hesitate to call me," Spock said, preparing to leave with McCoy.

"I'll bear that in mind, gentlemen. Goodnight, and thanks again."

Alone once more, Kirk entered the shower cubicle and let the sonics clean him thoroughly. He thought back over the events of the previous day, and cursed Cyrano Jones, Nilz Baris and everyone else on Space Station K-7. Most of all he cursed the furry 'harmless' little tribbles and fervently hoped that he would never have to look at another one as long as he lived.

He re-entered the bedroom and straightened the covers on his bunk, but he didn't get back into bed. Instead, he crossed over to the day cabin, sat behind his desk and poured out another glass of brandy. Gradually, his eyes began to droop and he was soon asleep, head cradled in his arms across the desk top.

James Kirk found himself walking through a field of wheat. Not just ordinary wheat, but a pedigree crop of quadrotriticale...



Waiting

Waiting,
Still waiting. If only I had gone down there, but
Starfleet said a message was coming.
Spock missing, McCoy searching.
Spock missing, McCoy searching.
The words spin round in my head.
If only I had been with them.
But Duty demanded I stay.
Yes, Duty demanded I stay.

Helpless.
So helpless, a prisoner of Starfleet Command, but
A Priority One message is coming, they say.
Spock hurt, McCoy worried.
Spock hurt, McCoy worried -
The words echo the dread in my heart.
If only I could be down there!
But Duty demands I stay.
Yes, Duty demands I stay.

Tired.
So tired of waiting for a message that never came, but
It's only important to Starfleet now.
Spock needs me, McCoy helpless.
Spock needs me, McCoy helpless.
The words tell me now where I must be.
I have to be down there with them.
My Duty is now to my friends.
Yes, Duty is now to my friends.

M. FROST





DIVERTISIMO



by

JANET STEWART

It felt good to get my feet back on terra firma again. *Although, of course, it wasn't terra firma really, I reminded myself; Jura firma, to be correct.* Old thought patterns die hard.

I strolled idly round the small town serving the spaceport, that first morning of our two-day visit, enjoying the warmth of Jura's star, feeling pleasantly relaxed. Good to see different faces, too. Not that I have anything against the faces I'm used to on board; far from it. After a long journey, though, you begin to feel you know every expression on every face, can even tell which expression will appear on any given face for any given occasion - with one exception, of course; and a change does nobody any harm.

Jura's only a small planet, of no special interest except for the fact that we haven't put in there before. We shouldn't have been there at all, really. If it hadn't been for an administrative cock-up we'd have continued on our scheduled voyage to Galvan to take part in the military exercises there. Word had reached us only the day before, though, from the slightly embarrassed organisers, that due to delays in their preparations, our presence would not be needed as soon as we thought. Being in the vicinity of Jura, notable for its friendliness, I'd therefore decided to put in there for a couple of days unexpected shore leave.

It had been six weeks since I had last felt the warmth from a sun - any sun - on my back, and pleasant thought it was at first, it wasn't long before it began to get a bit too much. Wiping my forehead with the back of my hand, I looked round for a way to escape the direct heat, wishing once again that the computer problem which had prevented Spock from joining me had not arisen. He would have loved the heat, would have basked and relaxed in it like a cat in front of the fire. I don't think he ever feels warm enough on the Enterprise, except in his quarters, of course. Still, there's nothing we can do about it; if we turned the heat up to suit him, everybody else would collapse with heat stroke, and Bones would have something to say about that. The needs of the many... All the same, I hoped he would soon tie up the problem and get down here, enjoy a bit of sunshine.

At the next junction, an alleyway wound to the left, turning sharply after a few metres to run parallel with the main highway. Side stepping into it, I followed its twisting route, grateful for the shade from the tall buildings. As my eyes became accustomed to the dimmer lights, I saw that, unlike the broad, open main road, the buildings here crowded each other for space; the upper storeys jutting out across the street like pictures I remembered as a child from old German fairy tales. Intrigued, I walked slowly past them. They appeared to be mostly shops, their narrow, mullioned windows full of dusty-looking antiques, although I couldn't see any sign of life in any of them. The whole street had a general air of neglect, the windows as dusty as the goods they were displaying, and the uneven footpaths in front piled high in several places with old boxes and



broken bits of bric a brac.

Thinking it must be the day the refuse collectors called, I worked my way through the piles of rubbish, pausing to watch a small green and white creature - not unlike a Terran dog, although with six legs - which was scavenging happily among the boxes.

"Here, boy." It seemed friendly, although it did not have a tail to wag, and it allowed me to pat its blunt, dog-like head for a few seconds before, lifting two of its legs, it watered the boxes in the way of all canine species the Universe over.

Smiling, wishing again that Spock was with me, I straightened up; and it was then that I saw it. In the shop window directly in front of me, it hung from a pole, its weight bowing the pole slightly. It was faded and very dirty, but unmistakable.

My uncle is something of an expert in antiques, and I remember his pointing one out to me in the Brazantine Museum. I had not been overly impressed; my taste in antiques is mainly for books, but Spock, who had been with us at the time, had seemed quite taken with it, discussing its merits with my uncle for some time.

Opening the door, I went into the shop's dim interior, pausing for a moment to look at a set of prisms set jangling by the door's movement, and walked over to inspect my find closely. Yes, it certainly appeared to be genuine. Although the colours were faded, they were in exactly the same sequence as the one in the museum, and the craftsman's name was woven into the fabric, just as I had remembered.

A hesitant cough told me the shop's proprietor was aware of my presence. "Are you interested in the map, Goodman? It is quite genuine. I purchased it from a merchant of excellent repute."

Turning to the Juran, I returned his grave bow with one of my own. A very formal race, the Jurans, very polite.

"Yes, it seems genuine. I have only ever seen one before, in a museum on Earth - my home planet. It looks in good condition too, though it could do with a wash."

The old man's face was horrified. "That would ruin it, Goodman! It is true it is in need of cleansing, but it would have to be done by an expert. To wash it could - "

I grinned at him. "I know. I was speaking in general terms. How much are you asking for it?"

"Twenty thousand credits."

It was my turn to look horrified, and he shrugged a little at my expression. "They are very rare. Like yourself, I have only ever seen one other."

"Strange, if you've had it for some time, that no-one has bought it."

The Juran sighed. "Not really strange. It was a mistake to buy it. As you are aware, it is a Terran antique. Very few Terrans come to Jura. I spent several years on your planet in my youth, and recognised it when I saw it for a rarity. Most people who come into the shop regard it as junk. As you said, it is very dirty. I had intended to get it cleaned, but never found the time. I paid twenty thousand credits for it myself. As it is, allowing for the passage of time, I would be selling at a loss."

Turning back to the wall hanging, I inspected it again. Beautifully woven, it depicted a map of the galaxy as it had appeared three hundred years ago. My uncle had told us that only about twenty of these maps had been woven, and this one certainly seemed a good specimen, the cloth still heavy, the coloured threads all present. *Clean it up, I thought, and mount it on fresh material, and it would look perfect on Spock's wall behind his fire shrine.* I could see his face as he discussed it with my uncle, appreciative and impressed.

In all the years that we have served together I have never given Spock a present. Close though we are, we have never gone in for that sort of thing. I know he must have a birthday, but I've no idea when it falls. I sometimes wonder if he has any idea how much I value him, both as an officer and as a friend. Many times I've wanted to tell him, but have never been able to find words that would not embarrass him. Surely this map would tell him. And besides, he would love it; it would be the ideal present for him. I came to a decision.

"I'll take it."

The shopkeeper looked surprised. I don't think he'd really expected to make a sale. Then in the universal manner of tradesmen, he pulled himself together; even seemed a little disappointed. I expect he realised he could have charged me more if he had had his wits about him!

"You have made a wise decision, Goodman. I am sure you will obtain much pleasure from your purchase. It will take me a little time to prepare it for you. As you see, it has been sewn into its frame, and I will have to undo the stitches. Can you wait? Or would you like to call back in a short time?"

"How long is 'a short time'?"

"About half of one of your Earth's hours."

I'm not the most patient of men, and besides I'd had enough of the dusty, dim atmosphere of the cluttered shop. "I think I'll take a look round, call back in half an hour."

He smiled then, a rather predatory smile which creased his old face into something like an antique itself. "Perhaps you have not much time before your ship sets off again, Goodman? Military vessels rarely stay as long as tourists."

Amused, I returned his smile. "Does it show that much? Even though I'm not in uniform?"

His smile deepened. "It shows. There is a certain air, Goodman... Enjoy your walk. It is a fine day. I will have the hanging ready for you when you return."

Leaving the ship, I quickly retraced my steps to the main highway, glad to feel the sun's warmth again after the rather chilly atmosphere of the antique shop. Halting outside one of the many inns along the roadside, I sat at a table set in the sun, in a small garden. I would have time for a drink.

Giving my order to the green-haired girl who came over to me, I sat in the sunshine in perfect contentment. The hanging map was exactly right for Spock. I smiled to myself, imagining his forthcoming surprise and appreciation. Thinking the smile was for her, the Juran girl flashed her amazing pink teeth at me as she put my drink on the table.

I had declined the Captain's invitation to accompany him on an exploratory tour of Alethen, Jura's spaceport, with reluctance. It was imperative, however, that the fault in one of the auxiliary computers be dealt with immediately.

As it transpired, the error proved to be easily repaired, and it was not long before I had remedied it to my satisfaction. Returning to my quarters, I changed out of uniform and made my way to the transporter room without delay. Captain Kirk had left an hour previously, and it was illogical to hope to find him in the busy town, but experience has taught me that the illogical does sometimes happen, particularly in connection with the Captain; and in any case, a stroll on solid ground would not be unpleasant.

Some further slight delay occurred when, on passing sickbay, I encountered Dr. McCoy, who - as is usual on seeing me - felt the need to make some jocular remark; this time on the subject of my apparel.

"My goodness, Spock, you won't get lost in the crowd in that get-up! Hope the Jurans have all got their sunglasses on." He backed away from me, holding a hand over his eyes as though to shield them from bright light.

I raised an eyebrow, knowing he expected it, and regarded him tranquilly. "Red is the native colour of my planet, Doctor, as I believe you know, and this is quite a muted shade. Should the inhabitants of Jura need sunglasses, it will be against the glare from their star, whose magnification at this season - "

"All right, all right. Scientific data I can do without. Just make sure you keep well away from anything inflammable, or you could be in danger of being charged with arson." Grinning happily at his supposed witticism, he stepped to one side, allowing me to pass and continue on my way.

My first impression of Jura's capital city was a pleasant one. Much can be learned about the character of a planet's populace by the condition of its ports, and as I walked the corridors and crossed the compound, I noticed a commendable order and cleanliness. It is not always thus. In my travels through the Galaxy, I have sometimes noticed much disorder and general disarray in many of these places; the worst offenders invariably being of Human descent. If my Captain were with me, he would now have reminded me that I am half Human myself, but I am content to think that in such matters I am entirely Vulcan.

This first impression was augmented by further experience. Alethen is a city of broad, clean highways, pleasantly lined with flowering trees, and with an atmosphere not unlike that of Vulcan... most agreeable after the somewhat chilly confines of the Enterprise.

After traversing these thoroughfares for twenty three minutes, I came to a junction where the main street intersected a narrower, twisting way, scarcely more than an alleyway, and glancing to my left, thought I caught a glimpse of Captain Kirk disappearing round a distant bend. Quickening my steps, I followed in his direction, glancing with interest into the windows of the shops which lined the roads. Here the scene was very different from what I had seen before. The street seemed to narrow with each bend, and the shops - most of which displayed articles of an antique nature - were positioned with no pattern of order, jostling each other for space and exhibiting a lamentable lack of care or cleanliness. Some even had piles of boxes on the footpath in front of them.

Although I walked briskly, I saw no further sign of the Captain. Indeed, apart from myself and a man working in one of the shop windows, the

only living thing in the alley was a brightly coloured sextuped, not unlike a Terran canine, which appeared to be following me. Pausing in order that it might catch up with me, I bent cautiously to stroke its green and white head, removing my hand hastily as it began to scratch itself with alarming vigour. I watched in some fascination as, having relieved the itch, it raised two of its legs and proceeded to relieve itself further.

Straightening up, I made a note to recount the incident to Jim when next I saw him. This small instance of the diversity, and yet the similarity, of the Galaxy would amuse him.

About to continue on my way, I found my attention suddenly caught by an object hanging loosely over the back of a chair in the window opposite. It appeared to have been carelessly placed, and yet... surely, if I was not mistaken...

Crossing swiftly to look more closely, I stood transfixed, taken back five years to a day when Jim and I, with Jim's uncle, had visited the Brazantine Museum on Earth. I examined the object - an old woven map of the universe - in detail. Although it was draped carelessly over the chair, most of its main features were in view, and I saw that it was, as I had thought, a replica of the museum piece.

Again memory supplied me with details of the earlier time. Jim's face, quietly rapt with appreciation. For myself, the old map had raised little interest, although out of politeness to our companion I had listened carefully to his extolation. Antiques in themselves do not rate highly in my opinion; this particular one, I noted again, was largely inaccurate also, giving rise to slight annoyance in my scientific mind. Jim, however, had seemed very impressed with it. Cleaned - and mounted on a new backcloth - it would look well in his cabin behind his collection of early printed books.

Many times the thought had occurred to me of making him a present. I am much in his debt - before he became Captain of the Enterprise, my life was very much one of work and meditation... and very little else. His easy manner and refusal to allow me to continue my solitary state showed me a whole new dimension of life. It would be difficult to tell him this without causing him embarrassment. Yet I would have liked him to know that I appreciated his presence in my life. Surely, if I were to give him this old map, which had impressed him so much... and besides - I had to be honest with myself - his pleasure on seeing it, on realising that it was his... would afford me great satisfaction. Opening the door of the shop, I went in, bending to avoid a set of prisms hanging precariously over the entrance.

The proprietor came towards me out of the shadows, bowing courteously. "It is a clement day, Goodman."

"Most clement," I agreed.

"Our climate is not unlike your native one."

"In this present season there is much similarity. Your season of rainfall had no parallel on my planet, however."

"Ah, I see you have visited Jura before?"

"No. But I have some knowledge of its conditions."

He bowed again. "You will forgive me if I hazard that you are a scholar, Goodman."

"It is an assumption which asks for no forgiveness. You are in error, though, if you use the term in its literal context. I am only a scholar inasmuch as every traveller through life is such." Moving to the map, I fingered it with interest. "This is an unusual item you have here. It appears to be a genuine Terran twentieth century map of the Universe."

"Indeed genuine." He smiled a little sourly. "And giving rise to much interest this morning."

"I would like to purchase it."

Spreading his hands, he looked agitated. "I very much regret that it is no longer for sale."

"I understand your reluctance to part with it. I would however offer you a good price for it."

His face changed, became sharper - even slightly crafty.

"Might I enquire the sum you have in mind?"

"Twenty thousand credits."

Again his expression changed, becoming smooth and unreadable. "I cannot sell it for so little."

"You are then prepared to sell if the price is right?"

He shrugged. "It is of great value to me. I could not let it go for less than thirty thousand."

I experienced some elation. "I will give you twenty five thousand... I can go no higher," I added swiftly, observing the flicker of his eyes.

"Very well. Twenty five thousand. I will roll it up for you, if you will give me the money. Could you hurry, Goodman, the shop is about to close, and I have much to attend to."

Taken aback by his sudden change in manner, I watched as he began hurriedly to roll the map. He seemed very agitated, his fingers slipping nervously on the material, and half way through the task, he broke off to move to the open door, and peered anxiously down the alleyway.

Following him, I looked over his shoulder, wondering what was troubling him, but could see no cause for alarm. Apart from the small sextuped the street was empty.

Unaware of my presence, he collided with me as he turned back to the shop, jumping with alarm as he did so. "Hurry, Goodman - the money, if you please."

I regarded him calmly. "I do not have so much money on me. Very little, in fact. I do of course have my computer tally, but I do not think it operates on Jura. You will have to deliver the map."

He sighed, standing still for a moment, regarding me anxiously; then, face clearing, he moved quickly to the door, locked it, and pulled down a dusty, creaking blind. Going to the window, he activated a similar one there, rendering the already dim shop to a state of near-total darkness.

"There," he said. "Now on-one can come in." Lighting a small lamp, he took a notepad from a shelf. "If you will give me your address, I will deliver the map this evening, when the shop closes for the night."

His strange behaviour was no concern of mine. I had the map, Jim would have his present; that was all that mattered. I nodded.

"I will execute payment when I receive it. You cannot of course come on board ship. I will come down to the spaceport when I have word you are there."

His eyes flickered again. This time, a look of something approaching distress possessed his features. "Would you be prepared to leave a deposit, Goodman? Mine is a precarious business. Once or twice I have delivered articles only to find that I have been the victim of a practical joke, and the people do not live at the address they gave. And occasionally people agree to buy goods with great enthusiasm, but when the goods arrive I find they have changed their minds and refuse to pay - and indeed are sometimes quite unpleasant about it."

"You have nothing to fear in that direction from me. I am who I say I am, and this address will find me. Do I look like a practical joker?"

"Indeed, Goodman, anything but. I do not wish to give offence. Only this morning, however, a customer called, most enthusiastic; promised to collect his purchase within half an hour." He shrugged. "Almost two hours have passed already, and no sign of him returning."

Allowing my expression to relax a little, I took out some money. "I understand your position. I will leave a deposit of two thousand credits, if you will sign for it."

"Gladly. I cannot leave my shop before sundown, but you have my word, the map will be delivered very shortly after I close for the night."

The rest of the morning, I spent wandering as my feet took me. The warmth of the sun was doubly agreeable after the chill of the antique shop, and was matched by an inner warmth as my mind dwelled upon Jim's forthcoming satisfaction.

Once again as I walked down the main highway I thought I caught a glimpse of him emerging at some speed from a small garden; but it was quite a distance away, and by the time I had reached the spot he had disappeared. The garden turned out to belong to a roadside cafe. As it was almost time for me to return to the ship, I decided to spend the next twenty seven minutes there, enjoying a refreshing drink amidst the prolific, colourful blooms in the garden.

I must have nodded off in the sun, always a stupid thing to do, especially in a strange place where you're not sure of its strength. If my face looked as red as it felt, I was in for quite a lecture from Bones. Serve me right, too.

Checking my chrono, I leaped to my feet, cursing, the quick movement setting off the warning throb of an incipient headache at the back of my neck.

"Would the Goodman like another drink?" The Juran girl was at my side, flashing her dazzling pink smile. "Oh, but you have not finished your first. Was it not to your liking?"

"Mmm? Oh, yes, it's fine." Hastily swallowing the remains of my drink, now warm and anything but refreshing, I pressed a credit note into her hand, straightened my crumpled shirt and swiftly left the garden. Two full hours gone, and I had told the antique dealer I would return in half

an hour. Worse, I had intended being back on board ship by now.

Trying to keep my burning face in the shade I hurried along the streets to the old shop. I would just have to curtail any further exploration of Alethen. I had only myself to blame - Spock had suggested we turn in last night a good two hours before we did, but the chess had been so absorbing that I had ignored him. Invariably when I ignore Spock I live to regret it, in the little things as well as the big.

By one of those strange coincidences that frequently occur, as soon as I thought of Spock I caught what looked like a glimpse of him some way down the road, near the garden cafe that I had just left. Well, I couldn't stop now. It probably wasn't him anyway. More than likely he was still mending the computer. Even if it were Spock, I wouldn't want to bump into him at that moment - on the way to collect his present. Reluctantly denying the strong urge to investigate, I hurried on to my destination.

It seemed a little early for mid-day closing, but when I got to the shop it was locked, with blinds drawn across both window and door. Surprised, I banged and shouted for some minutes with increasing impatience until at last the door rattled open and the old Juran stuck his head around it, his face a mixture of wariness and annoyance.

"There is no need to make such a noise, you will rouse the whole street!" And indeed, on looking, I did see a few heads stuck out of windows and doors.

"How else could I get you to come to the door? You certainly took your time. I'm sorry I'm later than arranged, I fell asleep in one of your roadside cafes."

"Yes, your face looks burned. You ought to put some medicament on it without delay."

Hmm, shades of Bones, I thought, wondering just what my face looked like. "Well, anyway, it's made me rather late, so if you'll give me my map, I'll settle up with you. Then I must get back."

Stepping past him, I went into the shop, waited for him to join me at the leather-topped desk which served as a counter. There was no sign of his doing so, and when I turned impatiently, he was standing just inside the door where I had left him, staring at me with the earlier wariness, and - surely - dismay?

"What's the matter? Isn't it ready yet?"

He started to say something, stammering a little, then swallowed nervously, stopped speaking and stared at me again.

"Oh, come on! I haven't got all day. What is it? You haven't sold it again in my absence, have you?" I laughed at my own joke.

"Well... Yes, I'm afraid I have."

It was my turn to stare. "But that's impossible. You sold it to me only a couple of hours ago."

"Yes, but Goodman, you did say you would return within the half hour. I thought you must have changed your mind, and - "

"Do I look like the sort of person who doesn't know his own mind?"

"No, indeed not. But people do sometimes come in to purchase

something which at the time appeals to their imagination. My goods have that effect on many. On reflection, however, they may realise that the article is too expensive, or would not fit where they thought; or perhaps it would not be a good present for their old relation back home... "

He shrugged. "I go to all the trouble of preparing it for them and then they fail to return. I thought something of the sort had happened in your case. I am most truly sorry, Goodman... "

It was a plausible explanation, and most likely true in most cases, but I didn't believe him in my case. I took a step towards him. "And if someone else came along and shows interest, you would be foolish to pass up the opportunity of making a sale."

He looked relieved at the pleasantness of my tone and the agreeability of my words. "I am glad you understand. I do have to make a living."

"Especially if that someone else happened to offer a higher price?"

Taken off guard, his eyes flickered tellingly. I took another step towards him.

"How could anyone else see it to want it, anyway? I thought you were taking it down for me."

"Yes, I had done so as arranged. I was reluctant to roll it up until the last minute; the fabric is very old. The map was resting over the back of the Rigellian chair you see in the window."

"Hmm. Well, you listen to me. What you have done contravenes all Galactic trading law - as you well know. Have you the address of this other person to whom you sold 'my' map?"

"Yes, Goodman, but - "

"But - ' nothing. You go right after him and get it back. Tell him you sold it in error. Tell him it was no longer yours to sell. Tell him anything you damn well like, but get it back - you hear me?"

He backed away from me to behind his desk. His frightened expression annoyed me even further. Did he think I was going to attack him or something? Then I caught sight of my face in an old, wood-framed mirror. What with anger and sunburn it was not a pretty sight. Still, if it served to frighten him into complying, all to the good. I glared at him more threateningly, just for good measure, and moved nearer.

The light, musical chimes of the prisms were incongruous in the loaded atmosphere of the shop as the door creaked open behind me. As he looked over my shoulder, the Juran's expression changed to one of acute embarrassment.

"Er... Goodman... here is the Romulan who has purchased you... er, the map. Perhaps you can come to some agreement between you."

Quickly, I composed my face. Romulan, eh? They were tricky customers at the best of times. If I wanted to persuade this one to let me have the map I'd better turn on the charm. Hiding my annoyance, I turned to the newcomer with a smile.

I needn't have bothered. Romulan, indeed! It was Spock. He must have seen me come in to the shop and followed me.

"Spock - " Then realisation dawned. "Spock?"

"Jim." For a moment he looked nonplussed. "What are you doing here?"

"The same as you, it seems."

He frowned. "Not quite the same, I think."

"Yes, quite the same. I've come to collect my map."

After my twenty seven minutes refreshment in the garden cafe, I made my way back to the spaceport, reflecting still on the Captain's present. It was to be delivered that evening. With my scientific knowledge, I would be quite capable of restoring it myself. Given the premise that my free time was not interfered with, I should have the map ready in six days' time.

I was a little dismayed, therefore, on arriving back on board, to be informed by Mr. Scott that instructions had that minute come through of a reversal in plan. Like my computer problem, the difficulties regarding the proposed military exercises had proved easier to overcome than had at first been apparent. We were now instructed to embark for Galvan in four hours, our time.

Lt. Uhura had been about to inform the Captain when I arrived, but I stopped her. Jim has little enough time for himself, and all the preparation was in hand. There was no need to recall our Captain for two more hours. I liked to think of him having these two extra hours to enjoy and refresh himself away from the all-consuming demands we make of him.

My own plans however had to be revised. The Juran had promised to deliver the map that evening. By then we would have long been on our way. Fortunately, with all the preparations being in order, I had ample time to return to Jura to collect the purchase myself.

Mr. Scott, who was Duty Officer, seemed a little puzzled when I informed him of my intention of returning to Jura. I felt no necessity for an explanation, however, and could see he expected none. It is not my custom to explain my actions, and the crew accepts this. Indeed, on the rare occasion I have attempted explanation, confusion usually arises, so I seldom give one. This state of affairs is all quite amicable. Over the years, the rest of the crew and myself have come to a genuine acceptance of each other, despite our differences. For the main part, we all have the Captain to thank for this.

The sun was high overhead and the shadows minimal as I traversed the by now familiar streets to the antique shop. The small six-legged creature was sitting on the step of the shop next to my destination as I passed, and although I spoke to it, this time it ignored me. It was chewing on something closely resembling what Humans call a 'sausage', and appeared totally engrossed.

Even that dark back alley had some small share of sunlight at that time of day, and I noted with pleasure the sparkle of light on the prisms as I opened the door to the shop. The merchant was facing me, his face dismayed and apprehensive. Surprised, I saw that he was talking to a most familiar figure, and from the atmosphere, I deduced that the talk was not too agreeable.

Before I could speak, Jim turned to me, his face - which seemed to have caught the sun - wearing the polite expression he reserves for tricky business and double dealing - oh, I know him well by now! At sight of me, this expression was immediately replaced by one of surprise, which may have

been mirrored on my own face before I controlled it. I would need to be careful. This situation could be awkward if Jim's present were to remain secret.

"Spock!... Spock?"

"Jim. What are you doing here?"

"The same as you, it seems."

I frowned slightly at his strange statement. "Not quite the same, I think."

"Yes. *Quite* the same. I've come to collect my map." And he explained, quickly and concisely, his morning's activities.

It is not often that I have trouble in finding words, but this was just such an occasion. When I did speak, it was an utterance which fully deserved the Captain's disgusted glare.

"Captain, your face looks most painful. You say you went to sleep in the sun? Rather remiss. You must ask the doctor for some remedial cream as soon as you board ship."

"Is that all you've got to say? What about this bloody map?"

I sighed, seeing all my intentions fade away. Then I suddenly thought, *If Jim thinks I want the map for myself, I can still surprise him with it later.* It was obvious that he had set his heart on it.

"Yes, it is unfortunate. I do consider that I have the prior claim, though, Captain. I have already paid a deposit."

He stared at me as if he had expected me to accede to his claim; as indeed I would have done, had I wanted the map for myself. I made myself return his disappointed look as coolly as possible, and at last he turned from me, shrugging a little, and began - ominously - to pace the small shop. In the background the Juran watched us, eyes moving from one to the other.

Suddenly Jim stopped and wheeled to face me. "A deposit? You mean you didn't have enough cash on you?"

"That is correct."

"Then the map is still here?"

"Yes."

His eyes lit with purpose, but before he could speak, the shopkeeper moved towards us. "Goodmen, it appears that you know each other. If I am correct, you serve on the same ship. Why do you not therefore share the map... and the expense? That way both of you will be satisfied."

Jim gave him a rather unpleasant look. "We can do without suggestions from you," he told him. "You have already caused enough trouble. Come on, Spock - " Taking my arm, he led me to the door. "We'll settle this outside, in private."

"Listen, Spock," he continued when the door had closed behind us. "I'm asking you to let me have the map. I'll refund your deposit. I promise you, you won't regret it."

I sighed again. "You are in error, Captain, I *would* regret it. I am sorry to be unable to comply, but I have determined to buy it, and buy it I will."

"I could always order you not to." He was half smiling now, knowing that his words were foolish.

"You could, but it would not get you the result you wish for. This is hardly a command affair."

This time he sighed. "You're a hard man, Spock. What if I tell you I'll be really disappointed - and I'm not joking now. Won't that change your mind?"

He almost succeeded. I could tell that he was in truth appealing to me. He was genuinely upset about the wretched map.

Just in time I remembered that he would get it eventually anyway. "No, Jim. This is one occasion when I am determined to have my way."

The words were not easy to say. Seeing his disappointment, I could stand it no longer. I opened my mouth to tell him exactly why I wanted the map, when his face suddenly changed and he burst into laughter, setting the narrow alley ringing, and causing the sextuped to leap sideways in alarm and to add to the noise with a high-pitched braying type of 'bark'. A small part of my attention was claimed by the appearance, in the erstwhile empty street, of several heads emerging from doors and windows, drawn, it would seem, by the noise.

Uncaring of the attention, the Captain continued to laugh for some time, amusement and sunburn making his face alarmingly red, then, taking hold of my arms, he shook me a little.

"Spock - if you only knew how idiotic it is... our arguing like this. You want the map; I want the map. Do you know *why* I want it, you dope? To give to you! I don't even like it much myself."

"You do not like it?"

"Not really, no. The only antiques I'm really interested in are books. I thought it would be a nice present for you, though. It should look good behind your fireshrine. I remember you admiring the one in the Museum, back on Earth."

"Of course," I said when I could speak. "I should have guessed."

"Guessed what?"

"That you wanted it for someone other than yourself."

"Yes, you should." His face was calm now, but there was a hint of reproach in his eyes. "Do you think I'd have held out against you otherwise?"

"And do you think I would, against you? I bought it to give to you!"

He stared at me. "I don't believe it."

"Nevertheless, it is true. I thought it the ideal present for you; to hang behind your collection of early printed books. You seemed to think highly of the one we saw on Earth some years ago."

"Spock - I was merely being polite, knowing my uncle's regard for it."

I was just making the appropriate noises."

"Likewise," I murmured.

"Huh? D'you mean... you don't like it either?"

"I cannot truthfully say I admire it, no. It has many inaccuracies which my mind cannot ignore."

We stared at each other in silence for some time, before he broke into laughter once more. "What a couple of idiots we are, Spock!"

"No, I do not think so, Jim. You have a saying - 'It is the thought that counts'."

He smiled at me, warmth as well as amusement in his eyes. "Yes indeed," he said softly.

I felt no need to prevent a similar warmth from appearing in my expression.

Behind us, a dry cough caused us both to turn. The Juran shopkeeper was standing in his doorway, watching us. "Have you come to a decision, Goodmen?"

"Yes. We don't want the map now, thank you." Jim's voice was forthright.

"Neither of you wants it?"

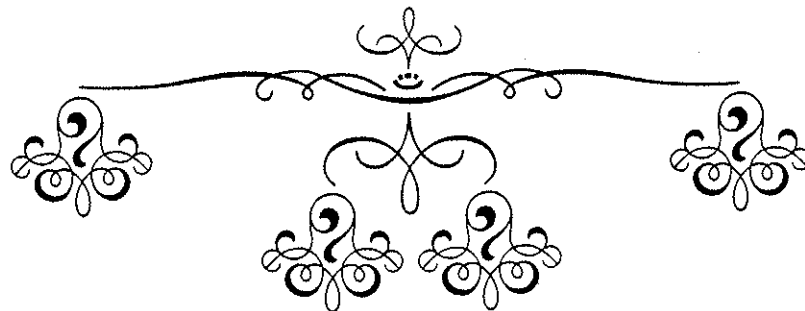
"No, thank you. We've decided against it... I'm sorry," he added after a short pause, though he did not sound sorry.

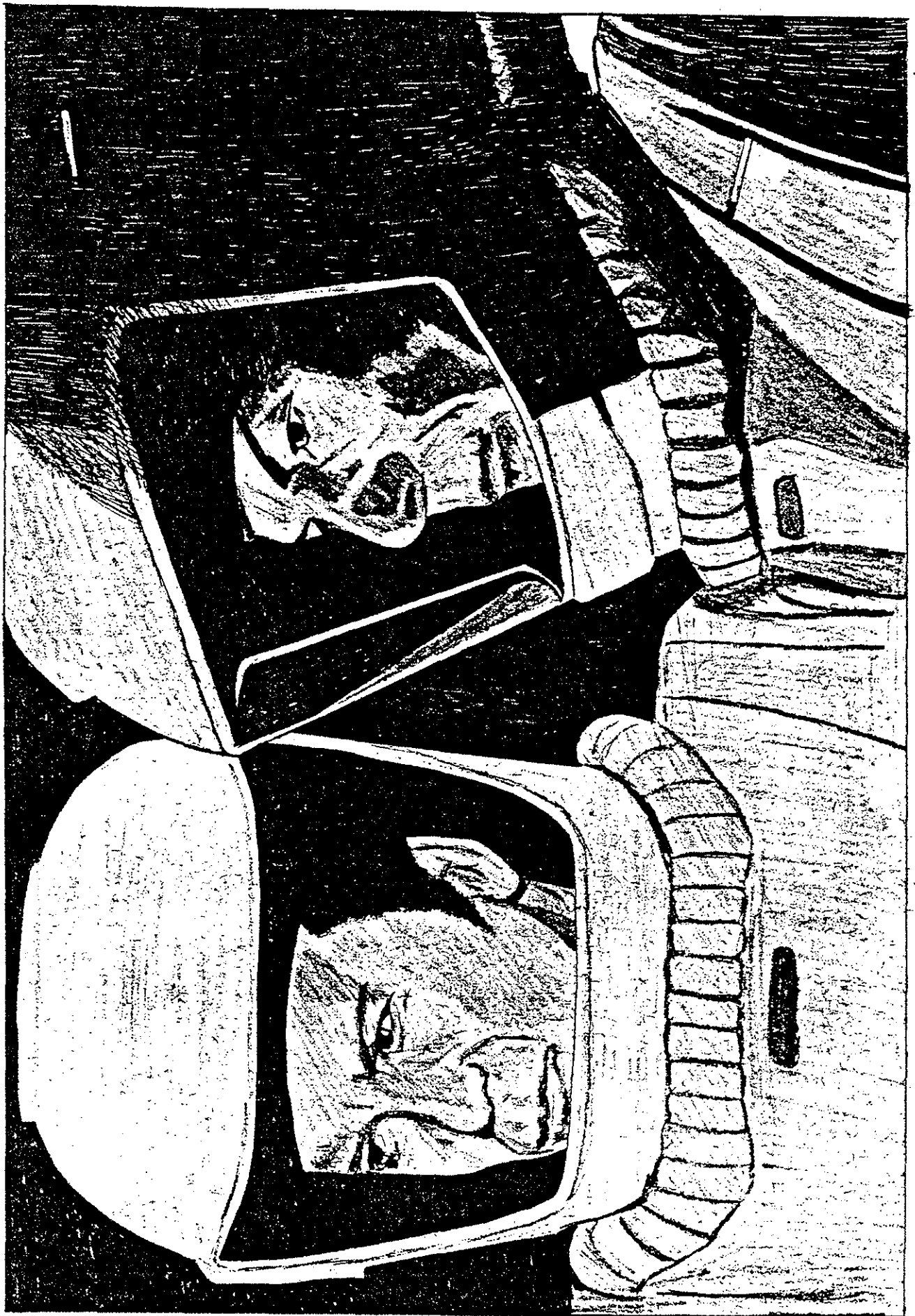
Not surprisingly, the man looked disappointed. I felt some sympathy for him. It is true that he had not quite practised an ethical code, but one could understand his action, under the circumstances.

"I will not require the return of my deposit," I informed him kindly.

His eyes lit up very slightly. "Well, that is generous of you, Goodman... "

"Yes, you may keep it - in exchange for these." Stepping forward, I unhooked the shimmering prisms. "They are not worth two thousand credits, though perhaps not much less. I have it in mind to take them as a present for my mother. They should look most effective in her sunken room, where they will admirably reflect the fountain... "





Apr '81

IT SHOULDN'T HAPPEN

to a DOCTOR 

BY

JOYCE DEVLIN

Mark you, being a doctor's one thing, but it's a whole different kettle of fish when you're a Starship doctor - and Chief Medical Officer at that. Especially when you've got a Captain like mine.

No disrespect - he's by far the best Captain in the Fleet and a good friend - but he's a pure pest when it comes to tracking him down for his routine medicals. Well - take the time when Starfleet landed me with a new Assistant Doctor, and a Vulcan at that.

Chris will tell you, I wasn't at all pleased, and as usual I ranted and raved at her. Honestly, I don't know why she doesn't ask for a transfer! ... No, that's not strictly true - I do know, but that's between her and me.

As it was I was busy looking over the new Doctor's personal file for the fourth time that evening when Chris came into my office.

"Honestly, Christine, how in hell's name do they expect me to work with a Vulcan?" I complained once again. (I'd done nothing *but* complain for the best part of the last hour - since our personnel officer handed me the files on the new crew.)

"You're able to work with Spock," she reminded me again - she'd been telling me that for the last hour.

"Yes, I know that - but Spock's different," I retorted.

"All right - so Spock's different; but that's because you know him. And another thing - what makes you so sure you won't be able to work with this new doctor?" she asked flatly.

"Well, because the new doctor's Vulcan... and female... that's what!" I replied rather hastily. I wasn't looking forward to working with a stone-faced, pointed-eared walking computer, who - no doubt - would turn my sickbay upside down to fit *her* notions of efficiency.

"I'm female and you work with me," she pointed out.

"You're different." I knew only too well that there was no way in which I was going to win without hurting someone. "Oh, I... " Thinking better of it, "Forget it," I said, defeated.

"You'll be pleased to hear that all bar one of the medicals have been completed," she informed me, firmly changing the subject. Of course I knew instantly who our absentee was, as I had completed Spock's that afternoon.

"The Captain?" I questioned, not in the least bit surprised. It was the same old routine - if it wasn't Spock it was Jim.

"Yes - but did you *really* have to ask?" she commented with a devilish

smile on her face.

"Nope. So - I'll deal with our beloved Captain first thing in the morning. Oh - tell Dr. T'Ria to report to me first thing - there's no point in our showing her around tonight... "

Being Chief Medical Officer has its advantages at times, for as I finished showing my charming new assistant around sickbay (T'Ria was absolutely nothing like I'd imagined) the Captain entered, and by the look on his face I knew that he had received - and not understood the purpose of - my deliberately cryptic note. He wouldn't be in the best of moods - he hates mysteries.

"You, Doctor, had better have a good explanation for hauling me down here," he growled.

Oh, boy - I was right. He *wasn't* in the best of moods.

"Oh, that I do, Jim, my friend. Your medical's long overdue, and as I have a new member of staff, I thought it would be a good opportunity to get it done while I could supervise." I played my ace.

"Oh, you did, did you." Jim responded. No, he was none too pleased.

"Yes, and now that you're here, there's no time like the present. Get stripped. And Jim - "

"What?"

"Be on your best behaviour."

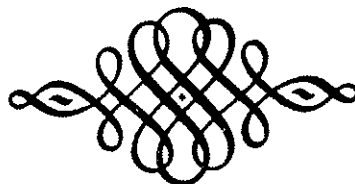
All Jim could do was glare. I could see the wheels turning as he tried to remember who the new medical officer was, but it was perfectly possible that he didn't know. Personnel would still be working with the records, as the new crew had only come aboard the previous night (Sickbay gets the first notification in case we have a sudden emergency involving any of them). Anyway, Jim stripped to the waist and parked himself on the examination table while I ushered in the new doctor.

Jim obviously could not believe his eyes. For once he was speechless as he registered the three facts; the new doctor was Vulcan - and female. And yours truly was enjoying the scene, beaming from ear to ear.

"After all, Jim, if you'd come down when you were first notified, I would have done it - but... "

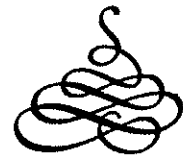
"All right, point taken, *Doctor*."

"Perhaps this will teach you not to avoid your friendly Family Doctor at medical times," I added, turning to the Vulcan. "All right, Doctor - carry on."





DESTINY



BY

LINDA SPENCER

"Commander Spock! You are being pulled into the black hole with him! Reduce speed! Reduce speed!"

Impatiently, Spock snapped off communications with his private cruiser. The Human Kirk was his, and he would not give him up now.

The Human was high on the 'wanted' list and probably possessed information which could decisively affect Vulcan strategy, could even tip the balance in Vulcan's favour. It was merely logical to pursue the escaped prisoner.

Through a black hole? whispered a mocking inner voice. Again he experienced that confusing mixture of sensations tightening the muscles of his chest and stomach. The Vulcan did not like to be confused - it... annoyed... him, he admitted with some shame; in a sudden surge of fresh irritation at himself, at Kirk, at his situation, he gave full power to the shuttle's limited drive.

On his viewscreen, he saw the stolen shuttle apparently suspended above the bottomless well of emptiness that was blacker than the matt void surrounding it.

Is the Human dead already, he wondered, and inexplicably felt his breath quicken and the weight on his chest grow heavier, and he knew detachedly that this fear was not for himself... although if ever a Vulcan had sufficient cause to permit himself the luxury of fear it was on the rim of oblivion that was known as a black hole, Spock thought wryly. With a further pang he suddenly recalled his growing respect, his admiration - yes, he could admit it now - his liking for his stubborn, courageous prisoner... and the Human, he reminded himself savagely, had encouraged his weakness...

Ruthlessly, Spock crushed the thought that in another time, another place, they might have been friends.

But no. No possibility of that. Illogical.

Terra and Vulcan were at war; a war which had lasted since their first days of contact, when the Federation, which Kirk - his prisoner - had served with great distinction as a Starship officer, had attempted to impose its rule on the traditionally independent Vulcan. True, the Federation had been peaceful in its objectives - on their original approach - but following their realisation of the possibility of an alliance of Vulcan with Romulus, Federation politicians had, in the interests of their member worlds, increased pressure until a war-hungry, ambitious and power-seeking Starship Captain - Garth - had attacked a Vulcan battlecruiser - or so, he declared, he had believed it to be. In reality it had been a training ship straying into Federation space due to a navigational error. Part of the Vulcan Fleet patrolling nearby had come to the aid of the lightly armed ship... The bitter, and to Spock's mind

illogical, battle had been raging ever since.

Nevertheless, as a loyal Vulcan he had done his duty, although many Vulcans still regarded him with suspicion due to his accursed Human blood.

Spock's particular duty involved the... appropriation... of key Starfleet personnel and he was an exceptionally efficient agent. He had - somewhat reluctantly - been escorting his latest prisoner back to Vulcan for interrogation by the Vulcan Masters; the unusually resourceful Human had traded on his treacherous Human feelings, encouraged him -

Damn was the nearest translation for the Vulcan curse Spock uttered as he recalled the Human's cunning escape. However, the area through which they had been passing to avoid detection by enemy ships was one of extreme instability, due to the warping effects on the surrounding space of the rotating black hole into which Spock now followed his... prisoner.

"I am registering faint life form readings," announced Spock, First Officer of the U.S.S. Enterprise, as he peered into his viewer.

"No identification on those shuttles yet?"

"Negative, Captain. They are not registered with the Federation, nor are they listed elsewhere in any known records."

"Hmm." Kirk swung round in his chair. "No response to communications, Lt. Uhura?"

"No, sir. If they are receiving transmissions, they are either unable or unwilling to respond."

"Very well, Lieutenant. Keep trying to raise them."

"Aye, sir."

"Captain... the life readings are fading rapidly," came Spock's quiet voice.

Captain James T. Kirk pursed his lips dubiously. This was supposed to be a routine exploration of a previously unexplored sector. What were these unregistered and apparently unpowered shuttles doing in the middle of unexplored space, several light years from the nearest - and uninhabited - system? The rotating black hole which Spock had been observing made this region unstable and dangerous. Kirk decided that he did not like the situation at all. Nonetheless, if those people on board the shuttles were dying...

"Mr. Spock - alert the transporter room... and have an armed security detail down there." Kirk stabbed at his intercom. "Kirk to sickbay."

"Sickbay. McCoy here."

"Bones - get yourself and a medical team down to the transporter room on the double. We may have some patients for you. Kirk out." The Captain strode towards the turbolift. "Mr. Spock, join me in the transporter room."

"Very well, Mr. Kyle." Kirk nodded then returned his attention to the transporter pad. As the two figures materialised, Kirk and Spock looked at

each other in amazement.

After the initial shock, McCoy, as usual, gave his attention to their medical condition. Scanning both men quickly and expertly, he glanced up at Kirk.

"They're in shock, Jim, pretty shaken up. The... er... Vulcan's not in too bad shape, but... er... this one - " he indicated the other Kirk. "There's evidence of some pretty bad internal bleeding - but he'll be O.K." The surgeon motioned his team closer and helped them to lift the *Human* carefully from the transporter pad. As they made to lift the *Vulcan*, however, the dark eyes flickered open to look up with swiftly disguised surprise into McCoy's vividly blue eyes.

"Kirk - my prisoner - is he... ?"

"He'll live," McCoy answered shortly, covering his incredulity. *Spock* sighed and lapsed once more into unconsciousness.

McCoy gave his Captain a troubled look. "Jim - did you hear that? He called... 'you'... his prisoner. How did a Jim Kirk come to be Spock's prisoner?"

The question hung heavily in the air as McCoy left hurriedly with his patients.

Kirk and Spock regarded each other in puzzled perturbation. "Fascinating," commented Spock at last. He deliberately employed his favourite term and to his satisfaction watched the tension in his friend's face relax. Kirk grinned affectionately, then, remembering Kyle's presence, restrained his urge to give his predictable Vulcan a friendly punch on the shoulder.

"Er... yes. I guess you could call it that," he answered, the hazel eyes teasing, as he led the way from the transporter room

Some hours later, in response to McCoy's hypo, *Spock* recovered consciousness rapidly and immediately registered his counterpart; he quickly masked his astonishment, merely permitting an eyebrow to rise.

"A clever plan, Kirk," he said coldly, addressing the Captain and yet keeping his gaze fixed upon Spock. "An agent to take my place in Vulcan Intelligence, I presume."

"Vulcan Intelligence?" Kirk glanced quickly at Spock, then, returning his gaze to *Spock*, nodded towards the next bed. "I think you have the wrong Kirk."

Spock turned his eyes to the *Human*, looking silently at the unconscious man for several moments. Kirk saw the mask of control slip a little as an expression of... concern? flashed across the stony features.

"Kirk? My Kirk... my prisoner - will he live?" he asked harshly.

"Yes, he'll be fine now," confirmed the doctor quietly.

"He is a valuable prisoner," continued the *Vulcan*, adding, somewhat defensively and unnecessarily, "that is my reason for enquiring as to his condition."

"Pig-headed as usual, wherever you're from," McCoy snorted, perceptive

as ever.

"Prisoner - that's the second time you've referred to... him... as your prisoner. What do you mean?" Kirk demanded.

"Precisely that," replied the *Vulcan* imperturbably. "I am Spock of Vulcan Intelligence. I captured the Human on a lone mission in Vulcan space and was returning with him to Vulcan when he escaped. I pursued him. Unfortunately, we were both pulled into a black hole. I had not expected either of us to survive."

"Then why did you enter it?" McCoy barked abruptly. "To get your prisoner back... or to save Jim Kirk?"

"As I have stated, the prisoner is valuable." *Spock* froze McCoy with a look, then leaned back against the pillows. "I have been cogitating upon the reasons for your presence here... and indeed, your presence," he said to Kirk and Spock. "It may indeed be a trap, of course, but I think not... taking into consideration the passage through a rotating black hole..." He paused for a moment, then continued thoughtfully. "I have, of course, encountered the theory of parallel universes - "

"And now you have encountered proof of that theory," Spock put in quietly. Then - "You have not answered my Captain's question fully. Why is... Jim Kirk... your prisoner? What has he done?"

"Your Captain? But he is Human... Of course! In this universe Humans and Vulcans are not enemies? You are not at war?"

"Negative. Is it then your claim that such a state of enmity does exist between the two species in your universe?"

"It is."

"Then... in your universe... you - Spock - and Jim Kirk are... enemies?" Spock's voice trembled almost noticeably and Kirk moved closer to his side.

"But not here?" His counterpart noticed the movement.

"We are the closest of friends," Kirk answered in a firm voice, his close presence warming and comforting his own Spock. The newcomer intercepted the swift look that passed between the two and a sudden envy possessed him. Resolutely, he suppressed it, but could not prevent his next words, although Kirk barely heard them.

"That is how it should be."

Kirk recognised the sadness and regret in the voice despite the customary impassivity of the face. He felt a surge of sympathy that *Spock* did not, in his obvious loneliness, command the devotion and love of his own Kirk...

At least, not yet, Kirk thought, remembering the concern for Kirk's well-being, irrespective of the logical excuses.

Spock made to rise, shrugging off McCoy's restraining hand. "I am functional, Doctor. I require no assistance from you."

"Well, I suppose I ought to know better than to argue... I was right; you are pig-headed."

Spock ignored him, turning to the Captain and First Officer.

"However, I will require your assistance in returning to my own - our own - universe," he said abruptly.

"And... *him*? What about... *Kirk*?" The Captain glanced at his counterpart.

"He will of course accompany me."

"And if he chooses to remain here? I remind you, you have no authority in this universe."

"I do not so choose." The voice of *Kirk* was weak but determined. He pushed himself up. "I am still a *Federation* officer on a mission. By staying here I would be no better than a deserter. If there's a chance for me to complete my mission I must take it. All I ask is a head start on... *him*." He jerked his head towards *Spock*. "The situation will be as it was before; nothing will have changed."

The two *Spocks* looked at each other with one accord, each acknowledging with a slight nod their respect for the man James *Kirk*.

"No," said *Kirk*. "The situation will not have changed... and if you're not careful it will never change. Your galaxy would be drawn further and further into a weakening war of attrition if *Vulcans* and *Humans* in your universe are as stubborn and as important to the galaxy as they are here." And your *Spock* needs you, he thought.

"No-one desires war," snapped *Kirk*.

"That is a useless platitude which has caused more bloodshed than any number of ambitious politicians - it suggests a complacency that I would not have expected from you," *Kirk* replied heatedly. "What you mean is that you won't do anything to stop it."

"Too much has happened! There have been too many crimes committed against my people!"

"And more people must die to avenge deaths which you cannot now prevent?"

"What would you have me do?" cried *Kirk*. "Appeal to the better natures of the *Vulcans*, appeal to their... logic? Don't you think it's been tried - by both sides? We've tried - and failed - countless times. If we yield the *Vulcans* will ally immediately with *Romulus*, another enemy waiting like vultures to attack the carcass of the defeated side; should the *Vulcans* yield, the *Romulans* will probably begin another struggle with the *Federation* to seize the world and dependencies of *Vulcan*... There are no winners, but there must be no losers either! Your reasoning is naive - typical of a civilisation protected from the realities of the natural suspicion and intolerance existing between different species, by the manipulations of politicians. You're a dreamer!"

"I am a Human. *Spock* is *Vulcan* - but he is closer to me than even my own Human brother was!" *Kirk* shot back. He coloured slightly, but continued. "We did not betray the dream by accepting the seductive reasoning of common sense. We had a vision - and we achieved it."

"But was your *Federation*, or whatever it is you serve, threatened with destruction? And if your systems were poor and underdeveloped, you would soon forget your scruples about the necessity - the inevitability - of war."

"There is no necessity about war - only peace." *Kirk* forced himself to

calm down and went on quietly. "I'm not saying it's a simple option - it's the toughest option to take. A lot tougher to take than war in some instances... and I'm not saying that war is always avoidable. What I am saying is - you've got to keep trying. As I once said before in... a similar situation - one man can change the future. I still believe that, and when it's *two* men with a vision and one of those men happens to be *Spock*... and the other, *James Kirk*... I'd say the probability of success was even greater."

Kirk fell back against the pillows. "I... would like to believe that," he said wearily, glancing almost reluctantly at *Spock*. Their eyes met and held. "What is your opinion of this... wishful thinking, *Spock of Vulcan*?"

Spock raised a familiar eyebrow. "I do not consider it to be merely wishful thinking. I consider it to be logical."

"Oh, yes - it's logical... but there are a lot of your people - and mine - who, let's face it, aren't particularly logical."

"Logic and understanding can be learned - if they are taught correctly."

"*Spock*?" *Kirk* swung himself upright, motioning *McCoy* aside. "You mean... You agree with him?"

"I... agree with him in principle. But I accept that in practice there would be difficulties."

McCoy moved forward, spreading his hands imploringly. "But look... you - both of you - you're talking about the possibility... You, *Spock* - you were his goaler, and you - you were his prisoner; but now you're talking about peace - regardless of difficulties. That's an achievement in itself."

He turned to *Spock*. "Tell me - when you return to your own universe - will you still want to hand over *Kirk*? Will you?" he repeated forcefully on receiving no immediate answer.

Spock lifted his head, regarded *Kirk* steadily. "No," he admitted finally. "No - I would not."

"And you, *Kirk* - would you be willing now to kill *Spock*, as you may have to, to cover your own escape?"

Kirk stood slowly. "I was never... willing... to kill *Spock*." He crossed to stand before the *Vulcan*. "Why did you follow me into the black hole?"

"I told myself... it was to recapture an important prisoner and to protect my honour... but my action was not logical; nor were those my sole reasons for pursuit. Indeed, I confess... I do not know why," he finished almost plaintively.

The two stood, looking at each other, knowing that at that moment an affinity, a rapport which had existed between them even as captor and prisoner, had strengthened into a bond which neither understood but whose existence both, by virtue of their innate honesty, were forced to accept regardless of their race and duty.

Kirk finally broke the silence. "There are already... loosely associated groups of pacifists, dissidents on both sides who simply require co-ordinating, a sense of unity to increase their effectiveness."

"And we would be well protected... we would by now be considered... casualties," *Spock* remarked.

Kirk nodded, subduing a twinge of regret, remembering the promise of command of the battle cruiser *Enterprise*. Then he looked at *Spock*, and laid gentle hands on the straight, rigid shoulders. "How did... this... happen - and why have we never seen it before?" he asked softly, openly, as usual scorning pretence.

"I think we did see it before," *Spock* answered, remembering the conversations and chess games with his 'prisoner'. "Our circumstances prevented its acknowledgement... but here," he sighed, "there is no war between us." *Nor will there ever be again*, he added silently.

"Perhaps we can... work together - help to achieve a peace," *Kirk* said hesitantly.

"If we attempt to work so closely, in such perilous situations, there must be complete trust between us," *Spock* warned. "I must know you, all of you... as you must understand me. There will be no time to learn of each other slowly. We will return to a war-torn universe where we are presumed dead, no identity, no place to hide, no-one to trust but each other. Can you, a *Human*, trust me, a *Vulcan*, with your mind? A link could save our lives - but could you trust me, as I choose to trust you, with my... my most private thoughts? It is a great thing to ask and normally I would not request it of a *Human*, who would naturally have great fear of the mind meld due to its obscene use by the once great Masters of Gol."

Kirk bit his lip; his intensive psychic defence training prevented any but the few *Vulcan* Masters from penetrating a *Federation* agent's mind. Now he would have to open his mind willingly to a *Vulcan* or lose *Spock's* embryo trust - and therefore their hope to fight together for peace... and more than that; he would lose *Spock's*... friendship? Yes - his friendship. It was that last thought which brought a new determination to the fine features.

"Meld with me." He reached out to the *Vulcan*. He owed a greater duty to peace than war.

Spock nodded, allowing his genuine pleasure to shine quietly in his dark eyes. After a brief preparatory breathing exercise he reached out to touch the *Human's* face.

The *Enterprise* men looked on tensely.

Spock?

I am here

Spock - what do I do?

Relax your mind. I will not probe your hidden thoughts. But first see me and why I am. To trust me you must know me.

Kirk shivered involuntarily as he experienced the dreadful loneliness of the *Vulcan* - half *Vulcan*, he realised with surprise, for in *Spock's* mind he read of *Spock's* birth to a *Human* slave, a favourite of the former *Ambassador Sarek*; *Spock's* childhood had been contented and protected, for despite his *Human* blood, *Sarek*, his father, had loved the son the *Human* woman *Amanda* had given him. On *Sarek's* death, however, his legitimate son *Salan* had driven the despised, favoured half-breed away. Only *Spock's*

determination and formidable intellect had carried him through the lonely, tortured years into adulthood and service in *Vulcan Intelligence*... and how lonely those years had been! *Kirk*, forgetting totally that this man had once been his enemy, reached out with his mind.

Spock. Spock - be my friend. I too have been lonely. Let us help each other. He drew *Spock* deeper into his own mind, opened up his deepest thoughts to the *Vulcan's* cool mind touch.

Spock saw the grief and loneliness which had sent the young *Kirk* into war on a one-man mission of vengeance against the *Vulcan* race following their destruction of the planet *Deneva* where the only remaining members of his family had lived. The dreadful slowness of their deaths by plague and subsequent madness had horrified even those *Vulgans* who had heard of it. Now, *Spock* trembled at the savagery of his own people. *Kirk* reached out, comforting, forgiving.

Spock, it was not you - it was the war.

A war we must seek to end.

Spock - stay with me... whatever happens.

In some strange way, I believe it is our destiny to be together.

Perhaps that's why we're here - to learn from this other Kirk and Spock.

Indeed, it is... odd that we should all be brought together... But for now - let us accept. This is how it must be - how it should be.

I accept - gladly, Spock... my friend.

I rejoice in your acceptance... t'hy'la.

The last word was hesitant although *Kirk* sensed that it was a term of affection, but respecting *Spock's Vulcan* reticence he suppressed his curiosity.

I must withdraw now.

No - not yet, please.

I must - Jim.

He felt the *Human's* pleasure on hearing the *Vulcan* mind-voice softly speak his given name.

Both men fought against a sudden, almost overwhelming sense of loss as the contact ended. They regarded each other solemnly for a moment of mute commitment. Then *Spock* turned to the *Enterprise* trio.

"We must now commence preparations to return to our own universe." He addressed his counterpart. "Will you assist me?"

"Of course," came the ready reply.

The other turned to *Kirk*, almost smiling. "Come, then. We have much to do, you and I."

"The shuttle is crossing the event horizon... now," announced *Spock*;

he lifted his head to look at Kirk. "Our sensors have lost contact, Captain."

He moved across the bridge to stand beside the command chair.

"Do you think they'll make it, Spock?" Kirk asked quietly.

"I consider the odds to be in their favour. They should re-emerge at the same point in space."

"And... the other thing, Spock. What do you think are their chances of success?"

"The odds have often been against us, Jim... but random factors have always shown a heartening tendency to operate in our favour. Yes, I think they will succeed in the end against all the odds - as long as they are together."

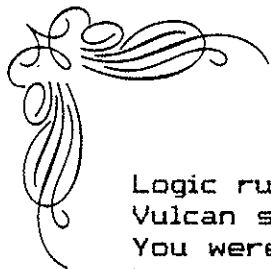
"Together, Spock - as we always have been, always will be."

The two allowed themselves the rare opportunity in a duty situation to express their mutual affection in a swift exchange of smiling glances, then Kirk straightened in his command chair.

"Bring her about, Mr. Sulu. Let's get on with the job."

As the huge Starship swung in a graceful arc, Kirk let a slight smile touch his lips.

"Good luck," he said softly.



Logic rules your life,
Vulcan son of mine.
You were always taught,
Logical son of mine.

Vulcan could not hold you,
Inquiring son of mine.
Starfleet was your way now,
Proud son of mine.

Enterprise your home now,
Lost son of mine.
Emotions crowd your world,
Friendless son of mine.

Kirk became your captain,
Lonely son of mine.
Friendship found your heart,
Changing son of mine.

Logic rules your life,
Honoured son of mine.
But love rules your heart,
Beloved son of mine.

M. FROST

REFLECTIONS ⁱⁿ ^{an} ALIEN EYE

by

SHERYL PETERSON

They were all lined up like slaves awaiting a buyer, some apprehensive, as if expecting only the worse, others eager, like curious children ready for an adventure, lured by the mystique of the stranger come among them. Someone new to know, to learn about, to judge and pass judgement upon, to accept and follow or merely to tolerate and obey grudgingly. Like slaves they had no choice of master or destiny, but could only accept what was their lot. Animals in a menagerie waiting for the footsteps of the new, unknown keeper, who would - in effect - own their lives from now on, for they would be his irrefutably in body though perhaps never in heart. They waited, each in his own way, and even the ship around them was silent as if she, too, waited for her new master.

He waited too. He was of their number, and yet never one of them. Though he stood with them now, the vital link between the old and the new, he was even more remote from them than ever before. As the caged eagle would look enigmatically through the imprisoning bars at the senseless, squabbling fragility of sparrows flitting past, so he looked on now, and the bars were no less real because they were not seen but rather only sensed in the dark anonymity of the eyes which saw everything, yet betrayed no hint of what lay behind. *A cage is only a prison if that which it holds wishes to escape*, he thought with irrevocable logic, and to that which was resigned to staying within, it offered sanctuary of a sort, a sure place of retreat from the senseless babble of undisciplined minds, from the incurious eyes of those who could not - or would not - understand why he must be apart *because of his very difference*, as the lion among Humans must go leashed, because of its aura of power that threatens all around it and makes it uneasy.

He waited, like a stone monument created by forgotten hands in a time too far gone to remember, a living sphinx, watching, ever waiting, for - he knew not what.

The stranger came at last in a blaze of light that somehow did not seem either to enhance - or detract from - his presence as a man. He was almost tiny, overshadowed by the entry portal which framed him like a triumphal arch for their scrutiny, like a butterfly pinned by the blades of their eyes, and helpless. His reputation had preceded him, and it was awesome. His deeds, his honours, were legion. He was the youngest ever to achieve this position, but at the moment all he looked was just that - young... and nervous.

He stepped forward and stopped, facing them all, like a child standing defiant while ringed by tormentors, waiting for the first attack. And in the dark eyes of the watcher, something flickered as he too readied his defences, like the wild beast drawing back from the bars when approached too closely, not trusting itself to be touched, to be hurt. His mind looked out from behind the barred windows of his eyes and withheld judgement, even while the other begged permission to come aboard, as if he thought they would deny it, and he gave it as if it was an automatic response that meant nothing.



But deep down, almost against his will, something stirred, remembering a child who must have looked just as this one did now, lonely, unsure. The alien who might never belong, ringed by those who had the power to accept or destroy him by their indifference. *As they still would*, he thought coldly, if he should allow them to pass through his defences. The lonely child had grown into a lonely man, hidden with fierce resolve behind a mask of brilliance and icy logic that seemingly had no flaw in the smooth perfection of its exterior. And now, he thought with a start that was almost one of amazement, he was on the point of feeling an alien sympathy for this stranger who was still yet so much an unknown quantity.

I do not even know if he will accept my presence here, he thought grimly, and just for a second the dark eyes forgot their self-imposed exile and flashed a challenge at this newcomer. Their eyes met, but where there was steel in the eyes of the one, in the gaze of the other was no resentment, not even distaste at his racial difference, though he had been startled in the first moment, despite obvious warnings beforehand.

Rather it was something bordering on... wonder, and surprised out of his habitual icy control, the first man forgot himself sufficiently to stare for one long moment into the oddly bright hazel eyes of the other. Of all the possible reactions he had mentally prepared himself to encounter, wonder had never entered his calculations. Now - for perhaps the first time in his life - he was at a loss. The silence between then seemed to stretch into eternity, though it could not have been more than a few seconds at most, for thought travels years in a breath - and the newcomer also travelled back along a shadowy road.

He too remembered a child, a mischievous, wilful child who, on a rare trip to the intergalactic menagerie in the big city, had rebelled at going home early, and run away from his adults, hiding in what he thought was an empty enclosure, full of shadows and strangely exciting musky scents that filled his eight-year-old head with strange visions of weird and undreamed-of places. He had crouched against the intricate locking mechanisms of the door, chuckling at his cleverness, thinking how he would sneak out and have the whole place to himself after locking-up time. Then his scalp had prickled as if some inner warning mechanism was being activated; and he had turned his head ever so slowly and seen it. It had seemed to fill all of the shadows at the other end of the cage-like enclosure so that he didn't know where it began or where it ended. To his eight-year-old mind, it had seemed like ten elephants rolled into one, but far more dismaying than the soft growl that rumbled from that cavernous mouth was the ominous rattling clang of the door as he lurched, panic-stricken, to his feet, and accidentally pushed it shut, trapping himself.

Sheer heart-stopping terror had frozen him to the spot, too paralysed to cry out even if there had been anyone to hear him. He had chosen this enclosure to hide in for its very isolation from the hub of the menagerie, wondering idly what the alien-sounding name on the outside meant, and why the cage was empty. Now he knew why his mother said, "Curiosity killed the cat!"

The growl had come again and he had tensed, waiting for the feel of teeth - or claws - or whatever the alien beast killed with, but when, after a seeming age, nothing had touched him, curiosity had again got the better of him. He had turned slowly, determined at least to see the thing before it killed him, and it was there, right behind him, its footfall so soft he had not even heard it approach. But - oddly - after the first horrible pang of fear, he had felt only wonder.

It had towered over him, the great head seeming to be all teeth and eyes, and a huge body blocking his vision on all sides, as if the walls were suddenly all of brown, furry substance, and there was nothing else left. Power had radiated from it, like the hum of a dynamo. Surely no living thing could have withstood its fury. And yet - surely there was no cruelty in those big soft eyes, only curiosity and... loneliness? Without any conscious thought as to why, he had stretched out

his hand towards it, waiting...

As he was waiting now, he thought suddenly, coming back to the present, seeing the walls retreat and grow brighter than the cage could possibly have been, feeling the strength of manhood flow through his body that only a minute ago had been still a child's with the promise of strength yet to come. Still in a dream, he listened with half an ear as the others in the party introduced themselves, and was able to smile pleasantly and make a suitable comment as the last one finished, but inside, he was bewildered. What on earth had made him remember that long-ago incident at the zoo? Even though his decision of a career had stemmed from that one fantastic meeting, why think of it now? At a time like this? When his whole future might depend on the impression he made on these men who would be his world and his strength in whatever lay ahead...

But then he turned again to face the first man, and as their eyes met, it all fell into place and he knew. He had remembered because it was all the same; only the dark eyes looking back this time were those of a man, and not an animal. Yet he was just as alien and... lonely?

Twenty odd years fell away in a second and with the sure instinct of the child he had been, and perhaps would always be - deep down - he stepped forward and held out his hand. "I hope we'll be friends. I'd like that," he said earnestly. Then he held his breath, waiting for the timid thing lurking behind the dark eyes to come forth and accept him, or fly away, forever out of reach. He knew that the others were watching, thunderstruck, but nothing mattered now. They did not exist. He had eyes only for the other, who, after a hesitant moment, gave a small nod as if acknowledging some unspoken thought, and raised his own hand in a curious, open-handed gesture.

"I am Spock," he said softly, as if that was all anyone needed to know, though the stripes of a Lieutenant-Commander glittered on his sleeves.

A smile broke openly across the face of the newcomer. "I'm Kirk," he said just as softly, also ignoring his own stripes, that proclaimed him a Captain. The grin became that of an impish child out to explore a new neighbourhood. "Spock. Let's go and look over our ship," he invited, waving an arm towards the door.

Our ship. It had a warm, friendly ring to it, and against all his Vulcan training, Spock felt warmed by it. "I would be honoured to show it to you, Captain," the Vulcan in him answered formally. "And - " He hesitated as his eyes, unbarred now, almost shyly sought the hazel eyes of the other - "Welcome aboard," he finished softly.

Kirk nodded, and thought, *And this time you say it for yourself, not because tradition demands it.* With a sense of... oneness... that he had never felt with anyone else before, he said gratefully, "Thank you, Spock. I am very happy to be here." He turned formally to the ring of officers watching open-mouthed. "Gentlemen, if you'll excuse us, we'll see you all at dinner. Mr. Spock, are you ready?" And before their wondering gaze, Kirk strolled out of the transporter room with Spock following as naturally as if he had always been beside him - and always would be.

Outside, as they traversed a corridor, Kirk asked on a sudden impulse, "Spock - have you ever heard of a... " He struggled to remember the name inscribed on that long-ago cage. "A seh-lat?" He mouthed it uncertainly.

To his surprise the Vulcan face showed quick interest. "It is a native of my own planet, Captain. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, I saw one once, long ago - I'll tell you about it some day." Kirk smiled, wondering what Spock would have said if he had seen the young Kirk asleep between its paws the following morning when the keepers finally found the runaway. He had been right - the creature had been lonely, and where a panicky move would have made it attack him, his trust had won its confidence. "Friendly things, aren't they?" he observed casually. Spock's reply floored him.

"Only to their chosen family, Captain. On Vulcan, we train them to guard children, as their constant companions. In their wild state, they are killers."

Kirk digested this unsettling information, and said uncertainly, "They sound good to have around."

Spock nodded, and remembered his own sehlat I-Chaya, always at his side for strength or comfort. Looking at this oddly child-like Human beside him, he felt, suddenly, what it had been to be I-Chaya, watching over 'his' youthful Spock, and decided there and then that he had found his place for the years ahead. Some instinct that was not entirely Vulcan told him that this one would take a lot of looking after, and seeing that it was impossible to procure a sehlat for him board a Starship, he would have to do instead.

He smiled to himself in forbidden amusement at the thought, and Kirk, turning unexpectedly, caught him at it, and not knowing - then - just how rare a sight he had been permitted to see, smiled delightedly back.

They went on in companionable silence, and the turbolift carried them to the bridge like two eagles to their eyrie, while, around them, the Enterprise gathered herself to fly them to the stars on the wings of warp speed.

Recalled to Life

A whole universe to myself.
And yet... is it indeed lonelier
Than a cosmos swollen with life
But without - *him*? The hollow echoes
Of others' thoughts traverse not this
Chasm of emptiness, yet still *he* touches
My spirit, in this cold purgatory;
Bright, calm reason tendrils out
A shining filigree of hope
Spanning this abyss of time
With his warm, steady soul-light.
Then I see him; his joy, flaring,
Beckons me, a beacon of home;
A welcome, a vow, a bonding
In that mute exchange; and I remember
Another time, and say again,
Now I speak of thee, t'hy'la,
"Never lose you, never."

I'm recalled to life and love.

LINDA SPENCER

four paws

by

LYN VIVIERS

"No! Absolutely not!"

"Be reasonable, Kevin. It's not much to ask of you."

"No, Connie. It's impossible. Do you realise what you are asking me to do?"

"Of course I do. Please - you are our only hope."

"What about the usual spaceliners - or a cargo freighter?"

"I've already explained all that to you. My leave has been postponed and the date has been put forward. It's impossible for me to go, and there are no liners going to Taurus IV at that time anyway; and as for freighters, I wouldn't dream of putting her onto one of *those* all by herself!"

"What about Rene?" Kevin argued. "Why didn't she take her?"

"Because she left earlier to make the arrangements, and we were going to follow." Connie allowed a trace of defeat to creep into her voice. "If you won't do this for me, your own flesh and blood, then that is that. Goodbye to a champion."

Kevin Riley rolled his eyes, throwing up his hands in defeat. "Okay, okay, I'll do it. I'll do it, but if the Captain finds out, you can say goodbye to me *and* to her. First he'll skin me, and then he'll skin her, and then he'll hang us up on his bulkhead as trophies; a reminder to all."

Connie laughed. "Oh, come now, Kevin! He doesn't have to know - and besides, it's a short trip to Taurus IV; you said you'd be going directly there."

"Just tell me - how am I going to get her aboard without being seen?" Riley asked.

"She has a travelling bag; guaranteed to be soundproof." Connie was smug now that she had won. Riley stopped pacing the room and eyed the topic of their conversation with suspicion. Winky-Poo - a spoiled, pampered Siamese cat with a pedigree as long as his arm. Never a hair out of place on her sleek coat. Piercing blue eyes stared unblinkingly at him from where she lounged on the couch. Her tail twitched ever so slightly.

They disliked each other intensely.

"I'll fetch her tomorrow. Make out a list of instructions of what to feed her - and Connie, please explain to that malevolent feline that she will have to behave herself!"

Connie hugged him. "Oh, Kevin, I love you! And thanks. Don't worry,

she won't be any trouble. You have to give her a chance to get to know you. She's a real darling - honestly."

Kevin was sceptical. The 'darling' had sunk her fangs into his hand when they had first been introduced. Admittedly, he *had* stepped onto her tail - not on purpose, of course. Oh, well - blood was thicker than water...

Riley walked nervously to the beam-up point. He was laden with his own bag - the carrier containing Winky-Poo - a list of what (and what not) to do - plus an innocent bottle of cat vitamin pills.

"Now remember, Kevin," Connie had said. "Only *one* tablet a day. Avoid giving her fish - she loathes it; chicken and small pieces of *lean* meat. She's not crazy about milk, but she must have fresh water all the time. The sandbox is also in the carrier, but you don't have to worry about that, as the chemicals and deodoriser in the sand will do all the work. The opening instructions are on the outside. I'll also spare you the task of brushing her - Rene will see to that when she arrives. Lucky she's a short-haired cat."

Just as well everything is portable, Riley grumbled to himself. He could hear no sound coming from the carrier - it really was soundproof - *and just as well*, he thought. Winky-Poo had a voice that could be heard a light year away.

Luck was on his side. Nobody else was waiting to be beamed up, and to his relief, only Kyle was in the transporter room when he materialised aboard the Enterprise.

"Hello, John. How was your shore leave?" Riley tried to sound casual.

Kyle's grin widened. "Like heaven," he beamed. "I found a perfect place on the edge of town, with the most - " He was interrupted as another beamup call came through.

Not wanting to appear rude, Riley waited. The figure on the platform solidified into Captain Kirk.

Riley jumped, and then glanced guiltily at the carrier on the floor beside him.

"Is anything the matter, Mr. Riley?" Kirk asked, following Riley's glance. "I hope you haven't brought anything illegal aboard!" he joked.

"N... no, sir," Riley stammered. Kirk smiled, nodded to them both and took his leave.

Riley swallowed. "Uh, John - I'll catch you another time. Must go and get cleaned up before my shift."

"Sure," Kyle said easily. "I'll meet you in the mess after second shift."

Riley made his escape to his quarters without further incident. Locking the door, he put the carrier onto the floor and depressed the release catches.

Winky-Poo shot out like a torpedo, releasing an agonising wail. She *hated* travelling. Now she stood in the middle of the cabin, tail lashing

furiously, with small growls sounding deep in her throat. With a pang of pity Riley realised how terrified she must be. She had been cooped up in the bag for a long time, only to discover, on her release, strange surroundings and a Human she could barely tolerate.

Riley sat on the edge of his bunk, watching her as she began washing furiously. When in doubt, wash.

"Take your time to settle in, old girl." She paused at the sound of his voice, eyes still full of suspicion. "You and I are going to have to start respecting each other if we're to share the same cabin. I hope we both survive! Your mistress has one very persuasive tongue."

Shrugging, he carried her bag to the bathroom and set about fixing her box and turning the carrier into a cozy sleeping basket.

Dr. McCoy was worried about Kevin Riley. The young officer looked nervous, and what worried the good Doctor even more was Riley's ravenous appetite. McCoy had been in the mess the first time Riley had polished off a plate full of food and then returned to the dispenser for a second helping - which he had taken away. He had made a point of being in the mess at the same time as Riley thereafter, and had watched the same performance every time. Riley seemed to be taking the second helping of food back to his cabin.

McCoy finally decided it was time he looked into the matter. Putting down his stylus, he called Nurse Chapel.

"Christine, see if you can track Kevin Riley down. I want him here for his physical as soon as possible."

"Of course, Doctor."

Riley was on his hands and knees trying to coax Winky-Poo into taking a vitamin pill. Every time he had tried, she spat it back at him.

They were four days out from Acreen and already he felt a wreck. That cat had a will of iron! She refused to sleep in the bathroom, preferring his bunk, and her vocal cords were getting him down. He never knew that a cat could nag like she did. She must have inherited it from Connie.

They had a shaky truce going, and as long as he didn't pick her up, she put up with him. The scratch on the back of his hand told the tale of that folly. But whose bed was it anyway? At least she approved of the food, which was devoured at an incredible rate.

The intercom beeped, and leaving the pill where the cat could see it, Riley climbed to his feet to answer it.

"Riley here."

Chapel's voice filtered through the speaker. "Lieutenant, Dr. McCoy wants you down for a physical."

"Now?"

"Yes. You are off duty?"

"I'll be there."

Riley sighed. Everything was happening to him. He hated physicals as much as Mr. Spock!

Entering sickbay, Riley was caught off balance by seeing Spock there. By the Vulcan's stance, he could see that McCoy had nailed him first, and the Vulcan was protesting. They had been arguing again. Riley grinned just as Spock glanced his way. The Vulcan's eyebrows shot up, and Riley quickly turned the grin into a cough, and froze. He still had the bottle of pills in his hand.

Much to McCoy's surprise, Riley hurried through to the diagnostic bed, unobtrusively placing the bottle on a table. He would collect them on his way out.

McCoy bustled in and adjusted dials. "Right. Let's get this done." As he took readings, McCoy dropped some innocent questions. "Sleeping well, Mr. Riley?"

"Yes, Doctor."

"Hmmm. Uh huh. Getting enough to eat?"

"Yes. Why do you ask?"

"Well, I have noticed that you've been hitting the food dispenser quite hard." McCoy smiled innocently.

"Oh. Yes, I... er... I get hungry during the night."

"Sure. Any headaches?"

One big one with four feet, Riley thought. "No, Doctor."

"Well, Mr. Riley, you seem healthy enough. I won't keep you any longer."

While the doctor had been busy with Riley, Christine had come across the bottle of tablets. She squinted at the contents as there was no label on the bottle. They looked like Dr. McCoy's special headache pills. She returned them to the cabinet in his office.

"That's all, Riley," McCoy said.

"Thanks, Doctor. Will I live?"

"You are as healthy as Spock," McCoy told him.

Riley got off the bed and then stopped short at the table. The tablets were gone!

"Anything wrong, Riley?" McCoy asked.

"Er... no, Doctor. Nothing at all." Oh, well. He was sure that Winky-Poo wouldn't die if she didn't have them. She wasn't eating them anyway.

Morosely, he made his way back to his cabin. He was due on the bridge at 1300 hours and had time for a quick shower and change. As the door slid open he closed his eyes in defeat.

Someone had been having fun in his absence. Papers lay scattered

across the cabin, most of them in shreds. The loose rug he had had been turned into a most interesting shape, and her ladyship was reclining on top of his clean uniform.

"Winky-Poo, get off my uniform!"

She twitched her tail at him.

Riley lost his temper. "GET OFF OF THERE!" he roared.

He had never seen a cat levitate before. Gone was the dignified feline and in her place was a wild flurry of paws and ears as she shot past him and into the bathroom with a strangled yowl.

One to me! Riley thought - and one hairy uniform.

"Got a minute, Bones?"

"Sure, Jim. Come on in. Coffee?"

"No, thanks. Just one of your wonder pills. I have a blazing headache."

"You should try to relax more, Jim. But you never listen to your doctor, do you? Here, take one of these and put your feet up for a while. No, don't argue. This is a milk run, and Spock can handle it. Nothing wrong with him! I just gave him his physical, as I'm sure he pointed out to you."

Kirk grinned. "Actually, he didn't. I wondered why he looked insulted... Yuck! These taste terrible - sort of yeasty."

McCoy raised an indignant eyebrow, almost as good as Spock's. "Not everything tastes nice. Now get out of here and do what I told you!"

"I'm going, I'm going!" Kirk cried in mock horror.

Riley was glad to be off duty. He kept on worrying what awaited him in his cabin. As he neared the door, Chekov stopped him.

"Want to have a game of Russian roulette?"

"Uh, not tonight, Pavel. Maybe tomorrow."

Chekov shrugged and turned to go, but was stopped short at Riley's desperate cry.

"Winky-Poo! No!"

Chekov swung round in surprise, to see Riley dive into his cabin. Then a pale streak shot past him.

"Did I see what I thought I saw? A pussycat? On the Enterprise?"

"Don't ask questions now!" Riley shouted. "We must catch her!"

"We?" Chekov asked innocently, but Riley was already running down the corridor and Chekov was hard put to catch up with him.

The turbolift doors snapped open, and Riley and Chekov watched in fascination as Dr. McCoy stepped out. Seeing another escape route, Winky-Poo swerved, shooting between the doctor's legs and into the lift. The doors shut as McCoy lost his balance from sheer surprise and landed flat on his face. He stayed down, shaking his head, as Riley and Chekov hurtled up.

"Doctor, are you hurt?" Chekov asked anxiously.

"What in the nine worlds happened? What was that?"

"Let me help you up. Do you need a medic?"

"I happen to be one, Ensign. I was only winded. But you haven't answered my question. What was that?" He sneezed.

Riley sighed. Already he was for the high jump. "It was Winky-Poo. A cat," he confessed.

McCoy looked startled. "A cat? Oh, no! I'm allergic to cats!" And he sneezed again.

Riley's heart sank lower. Now Dr. McCoy would be included in the lynch team.

"You... you don't happen to know where that cat was headed?" McCoy glared at him. "No - I didn't think you would.

Spock looked over the bridge with satisfaction. He preferred a calm, efficient bridge crew, and that was not always the case when the Captain was there. The efficiency was always there, of course - the Enterprise crew was the best - but Kirk did have a tendency to allow what Spock considered to be a lamentable degree of informality during routine flight.

He mused over their current assignment. A straight trip to Taurus IV of approximately 8.2 days to collect needed medical supplies, extra engineering equipment and their new orders from Starfleet. Spock allowed himself to wonder where they would be heading this time. Their last assignment had taken them to the borders of the neutral zone; causing two months of constant tension on the part of the Human crew. At least they had settled down after the last shore leave, on Acreen. A bit of rest could do wonders for Humans.

Spock let his gaze flicker over each bridge member. Lts. Sulu and Di Falco were quietly conversing over a navigational exercise, Uhura was engrossed in her communications board, and a little behind him, Scott and an ensign were working out a new formula for the engines - not that they needed it. The engineer always kept his charges at 100% efficiency.

Spock heard the turbolift doors opening, and the calm of his bridge was instantly shattered. A small ball of spitting fur erupted onto the bridge. It shot past him, coming to a halt in front of the main viewscreen where it crouched, fur on end, ears flattened and a soundless snarl coming from its throat.

Spock sat in stunned silence.

"Where did that beastie come from?" Scott asked nobody in particular.

"It's a cat!" Uhura exclaimed.

The bridge was a babble of voices as everyone made a move to get a closer look.

Spock stood, his quiet voice making itself heard. "Please return to your posts. Your behaviour is causing the creature distress."

It had the desired effect. They all returned to their posts, sneaking glances at the furious cat. At length she calmed down, but she remained where she was, watching every movement with brilliant eyes.

"Does anybody know where this creature comes from, or to whom it belongs?"

"No, sir," came from around the bridge.

Spock stood. "It cannot stay on the bridge." He moved carefully towards it. It watched him closely, and then - to everybody's surprise, most of all Spock's - it padded towards him, issuing raucous cries, and then twined round his leg, purring thundrously.

"Why, Mr. Spock - it likes you," Uhura said.

Spock gave her his best look, then picked the cat up. It nestled against his shoulder, eyes glazed with affection. He turned to a security guard.

"Mr. Miles, take our visitor to Lab. 4. There is a large cage there where it can be confined until the owner is found. Lt. Uhura, please inform Mr. Hailey of his new guest."

"Aye, sir."

As Miles reached out to take the burden, a furry paw lashed out, claws extended. "I don't think it likes me, sir," Miles remarked with careful restraint, studying the ruby drops of blood on the back of his hand.

Spock thought this over. "Mr. Scott. You have the con. I shall take the creature to Lab. 4."

As the turbolift doors closed behind him, Sulu whispered to Uhura, "Perhaps it thinks Spock is family."

Squaring his shoulders, Riley pressed the buzzer to the Captain's quarters. The door opened, and he marched in, to stand at attention before the Captain, Mr. Spock and Dr. McCoy. At least, he thought it was McCoy - the third face was round and puffy, the eyes mere slits. If it weren't so serious he would have laughed.

"Mr. Riley," Kirk said mildly, "I am sure you know why you have been called here?"

"I... have a good idea, sir."

"I am sure you do. Firstly, your... 'property'... has been found, as you no doubt have heard, and is confined in Lab. 4 under Mr. Hailey's care." Riley looked relieved. "Now, Mr. Riley, perhaps you would care to explain why you brought an animal aboard my ship against Starfleet regulations, and why I shouldn't put you on report?"

Riley swallowed. "Winky-Poo belongs to my cousin, sir."

"Winky-Poo?"

"The cat, sir. She's highly pedigreed, and has an outstanding chance of winning the Cat Championship on Taurus IV. My cousin couldn't get her there on time, so I was... er... sort of... er... talked into it. At Acreeen."

"How fortunate we were going the right way," McCoy said drily.

"Not now, Bones," Kirk ordered.

"Sir, I know I shouldn't have brought her aboard without permission, if at all, but I didn't think she would cause all this trouble - I mean, running loose, getting up to the bridge... and Dr. McCoy's allergy..." McCoy scowled - or tried to.

"Lieutenant," Spock put in. "Did it not occur to you that Captain Kirk would have given you his permission, under the circumstances?"

"Er... no, sir, it didn't. I mean, it's not so long ago that we had those tribbles aboard, and if you remember, the Captain's reaction - "

"Yes, quite," Kirk said hastily. "Mr. Riley, your cat will stay in that cage in the lab. until we get to Taurus IV. Count yourself lucky that I leave it at that. What were you supposed to do with the animal once you reached Taurus IV, anyway?"

"Deliver her to another cousin who's already there," Riley said hastily. "Thank you, sir. I'm... relieved - she doesn't like me. Doctor, I really am sorry."

McCoy nodded graciously, but Riley wasn't finished. "And Doctor - can I have those vitamin tablets back?"

"What tablets?"

"Well, when you did my physical, I left them on a table in sickbay, but they were gone when I looked for them afterwards."

"What are they called?"

"I don't know, sir. The bottle had no label on it, but they were small and brown and smell of yeast." He was surprised by the look that dawned on the faces of both McCoy and Kirk.

"Bones - " Kirk started.

"I'll be right back Jim. Mr. Riley, come with me." He nearly dragged the startled Riley out and they hurried down to sickbay and into his office. McCoy opened his medicine cabinet and handed Riley a bottle.

"Is this them?"

"Yes, Doctor."

McCoy's face fell. "Good grief. Give me one - I want to analyse it."

"Cat pills!" Kirk roared. "You've been feeding me cat pills! No wonder my headache didn't go away!"

"Now Jim - don't get so upset. They're quite harmless to Humans, so

there's nothing to worry about. I had one analysed, and they consist of nothing but vitamins A, B1, 2 and 6, also vitamins D and E; and liver extract. They're good for you. Sure to put a shine to your fur and a flick to your tail."

Kirk gave up. He chortled and then laughed until the tears ran down his face.

"Get out of here, Bones. Get out before I bite you!"

Riley stood on the transporter platform, the carrier with Winky-Poo next to him. He was surprised at the number of people in the transporter room, but correctly guessed that they were there to see Winky-Poo off. The little fink had gained many admirers over the past days. The famous grapevine had been red hot, and someone had always been slipping into the lab. to visit her. To judge from the many times the 'locked door' light had been on, she had also been sprung from her cage and shamefully spoiled.

"Energize," Riley ordered.

As the room dissolved, the last voice he heard was Scott's.

"Give 'em hell, lassie!"

The supplies had been loaded, the new mission revealed and the great ship was battened down ready to depart when a message came in from Rene. Her champion had done it, winning the coveted blue ribbon.

Deep down in each crewmember's heart was the feeling of pride.

Their baby had done it!

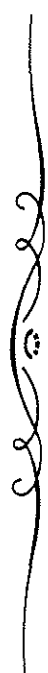


STORY OF A SAD TEDDY BEAR

A kind-looking lady bought me today
And I was filled with joy
For I'm destined for the loving arms
Of some little girl or boy.

But this was not to be;
I was parcelled and put on a ship.
Farewell, dear old Earth;
It's going to be a long, long trip.

At last my journey was over
And to my new owner I came.
What is this place they have brought me to?
Earth was never the same!
A little boy now owned me
He was only two years old.
He had pointed ears and a serious face,
His expression left me cold.
He never cuddled or loved me
My colour has turned to rust
As I sit on the shelf
Alone and abandoned
With my fur all covered in dust...



JANICE PITKETHLEY

the SERPENTS of PAXO BETA

by

DAVID GOMM

SPACE

THE LAST BONANZA

THESE ARE THE VOYAGES OF THE STARSHIP - SAUCY SUE

ITS FIVE YEAR MISSION:

TO PLUNDER RICH NEW WORLDS

TO ENSLAVE NEW LIFE AND NEW CIVILISATIONS

TO COLDLY DO WHAT NO MAN HAS DONE BEFORE

The tall man with the pointed ears came out of the Captain's cabin, a rapturous smile on his face. He looked round him, making sure he was unobserved. Then, closing the door silently behind him, he hurried away towards the bridge elevator.

Unseen in an alcove, two female members of the crew watched, sniggering. The taller, a blonde with curiously plaited hair, stared after him, eyes wide with disbelief. Her companion, shorter, younger, a light brunette with a very pronounced bump to the bridge of her nose, stifled her laughter with an effort. "Now do you believe me?"

"Pretty conclusive," agreed the blonde. She hesitated. "Doesn't it bother you? I mean, I thought you rather fancied him yourself."

"I did at first," her friend admitted. "You get used to it, though. Mind you, I did lose a lot of respect for him the first time I caught him in there, whopping one up."

The blonde's eyebrows lifted. "Only one?" she queried innocently, giving voice to a scurrilous rumour which had been sweeping the ship, namely that Vulcans were endowed with two of everything - but *everything*.

The girls' laughter was quelled by the sound of footsteps, accompanied by a dreadful caterwauling noise. The newcomer was the classic stage caricature of a Scotsman. His kilt was fully six inches too long, his bonnet stood up like a tartan onion with a woolly pompom on it, and in his hand he carried an empty whisky bottle. He was singing, "I belong tae Glasgow" at the top of a most unmelodious vice.

The two girls remained hidden until the apparition had passed them, then slipped out of their alcove and followed the First Officer. A minute or so later the Chief Engineer lurched into the sickbay.

"I wanna see the Doc," he demanded. His eye lit upon the ship's Chief Medical Officer. "This so-called tonic ye prescribed for me. It's no' the



real McCoy. There's nae satisfaction in it - nae satisfaction at a'." He waved the whisky bottle in the Doctor's face.

"You don't say," growled the doctor. "In that case there's only one thing left to try. Nurse - Prescription Thirteen."

"Very good, Doctor." The nurse crossed the floor and opened a large cupboard marked with the figure '13'. Inside it, piled from floor to ceiling, were stacks of cardboard boxes, about fifteen inches long and having a five-inch square cross-section. Each bore the legend 'Saucy Mary Sue - The Inflatable Wonder Worker'. She took the topmost box and held it out to the Chief Engineer's trembling, eager hands.

And the screen went blank.

CAPTAIN'S LOG, STARDATE 6004.2

The Enterprise is in complex orbit in the Binary Planetary System Paxo 111. After rejecting all outside contact for many years, the Paxoans have agreed to receive simultaneous missions from the Federation and the Klingon Empire. They have stipulated that each side must send only the Captain and crew of one typical Starship, with no career diplomats.

The Enterprise has been nominated as the Federation's representative.

A babel of conversation broke out. Spock waited patiently for it to die down. When it didn't, he tapped the lectern three times for silence.

"That is the complete transmission as the ship's monitors received it," he said. "It would appear to be a fragment of a much longer broadcast. Clearly it is meant to depict members of the crew of the Enterprise. This enquiry is being held to establish whether any of those portrayed can shed light on the purpose of the broadcast, or its origin." He leaned towards a data input microphone. "Commence recording."

"Recording," confirmed the computer tonelessly.

"The whole thing's preposterous, Spock," exploded McCoy. "Dammit, I'm a doctor, not a... a porn pedlar!"

"He's right, Mr. Spock." Scott looked even more worried than usual. "I'll admit I like a dram, but ye'll never see me in *that* condition - at least, not aboard ship. And what could I possibly cure wi' a wee plastic dolly?"

"The mind boggles," whispered Yeoman Rand to her neighbour.

"Doesn't it just!" the Deputy Science Officer whispered back, forgetting, not for the first time - that her Chief's ears were as sharp as they were pointed.

"Did you speak, Miss Kinshaw?"

The D.S.O. was not one to be lost for words. "Yes, sir. I was saying that if that Jean Chinwiska character was meant to be me, then it was a rotten insult. Her nose would have done credit to Julius Caesar."

Janice Rand picked up her cue. "And Jane Rancid's hairdo looked like a chequer board - except that they forgot to paint in the black squares."

There was a general chorus of agreement.

"Interesting." Spock turned aside and addressed the computer directly. "Characters in the broadcast are clearly recognisable to all but their direct counterparts. In actual fact, although some physical characteristics are accentuated, with one exception the likenesses are quite - passable."

"What's the exception, Spock?" McCoy couldn't resist asking.

"Thank you, Doctor. I was about to add that the ears of the character Pocks were grossly exaggerated, to the point of caricature." He paused, and looked around the room. "If there are no further observations upon physical appearances?"

From the renewed indignant murmuring it was obvious that there were to be quite a number of further observations. They were cut short by the shrill of the intercom, followed by Uhura's "Bridge to Mr. Spock."

"Spock here, Lieutenant."

"Klingon warship now in contact, sir. E.T.A. in twenty one minutes."

"Kirk here, Spock."

"Yes, Captain?"

"I'm afraid you'll have to postpone your enquiry. Have all officers report to the bridge in ten minutes for briefing. We're going visiting."

"Have we an identification on that Klingon yet, Mr. Sulu?"

"Aye, sir. She's the Krayda'ak. Commander Lung."

"Lung? That's not a Klingon name. Computer check, Mr. Spock."

"At once, Captain." The data banks took only seconds to come up with the information. "The Krayda'ak would seem to be well named, Captain. The word denotes a Klingon bird of prey, akin to your vulture but with a preference for living flesh. Commander Lung has a reputation as a sadistic and pitiless warrior with very little to commend him. His given name is Keth. The soubriquet 'Lung' was applied to him by the instructors on his Command Course, and subsequently adopted by him as his own. The literal translation is 'The Fiend'."

"That's good news, Mr. Spock."

"Indeed it is, Captain., Our task on Faxy Alpha would be immeasurably harder had we been up against one of the 'good' Klingons."

"The only 'good' Klingon's a dead one," came a growl from the navigation console.

"An attitude which contributed much towards every war in your history, Mr. Chekov," observed Spock.

"And quite untrue," his captain added. "There is good and bad in everyone."

"It's just that the Klingons were a long way back in the queue when the good was handed out," grinned Sulu.

"You may have a point, Mr. Sulu," Kirk conceded with smile. Then he became serious. "The terms of our agreement with the Paxoans require that two officers from the Enterprise shall be beamed aboard the - what was her name again?"

"The Krayda'ak, Captain."

"Beamed aboard the Krayda'ak, and two of hers will be received on the Enterprise, as a gesture of mutual trust. Mr. Scott, Miss Kinshaw, you will report to the transporter room. Keep your eyes open aboard the Klingon, but be careful - we don't want an incident. Ensign Potato, you will take a security detachment and escort the Klingon visitors to the bridge. And Potato - "

"Aye, sorr?"

"Remember - these are supposed to be honoured guests. Treat them as such - but watch them all the same."

"When do we beam down, Jim?" asked Dr. McCoy when Scott and his party had gone.

"You don't, I'm afraid, Doctor." And as McCoy opened his mouth to protest, "Sorry, Bones, but orders are that none of the humanitarian grades are to be included in the mission. The Paxoans wish to judge us at our worst." Kirk gave a half smile. "That means you and me, Spock. Mr. Sulu, you will nominate a skeleton crew to remain with you aboard ship. The remainder of the ship's company will commence transportation in thirty minutes."

In accordance with custom, Captain and First Officer were the last to leave the ship. The co-ordinates they had been given proved to be those of a windowless antechamber close by the Place of Augury, where the examination of the rival cultures was to be conducted. They were greeted by a small party of Paxoans in the charge of a Minor Augur.

At first sight their hosts were not prepossessing. Humanoid but in an indefinable way non-Human, their faces were not unlike those of the Klingons, but with an expression of dignified prissiness replacing the latter's coarse belligerence. The Minor Augur's voice, when he spoke, had an unctuousness which perfectly complemented his facial expression.

"Captain Kirk. Greetings. I am Augur Divene. It is my pleasant duty to conduct you personally to the Place of Augury."

Having said which, he made no move to do anything of the kind.

After a long and uncomfortable silence, Kirk said as diffidently as he could, "Shall we go?"

"In a moment, Captain. Commander Lung will be joining us at any moment." Even as he spoke, the 'snappp' of a Klingon transporter heralded the arrival of the Krayda'ak's Commander.

It was immediately obvious that here was no ordinary Klingon. Lung was a strikingly handsome individual, with none of the brutishness apparent in so many Klingon faces. Only his eyes, almost colourless and deathly cold, betrayed the sadistic killer portrayed by the Enterprise's computer. He bowed stiffly to the Minor Augur, inclined his head curtly towards Kirk, barely acknowledging the latter's presence, and marched out of the antechamber without a word.

The Place of Augury was a cathedral-like structure with a hundred-foot high glass dome tacked incongruously on one end. Lung strode arrogantly up the carpeted path and through the main doors. Spock, by contrast, realising that this building held considerable mystical or religious significance for the Paxoans, drew one of the lesser officials aside and enquired, "What is the custom?"

Out of the corner of his eye he saw the Minor Augur and his aides exchange nods of approval as his own companion replied, "We of Paxo Alpha must follow pre-ordained ritual obeisances which may not be discussed with outworlders. For you, it is sufficient that your heads be covered until the augury begins." And as Kirk and Spock glanced instinctively at each other's bare heads, "Do not concern yourselves; Humility Cloths are provided."

The Humility Cloths were handed to them as they passed through the doors into the unaccustomed darkness. They proved to be irregular pentagons of a brightly-coloured material, each angle of which culminated in a hollow metal sphere. There followed an interlude of considerable puzzlement as to how the cloths should correctly be worn - or, indeed, whether they could be persuaded to remain in place at all. The Klingon Commander had evidently given up the unequal struggle because his blue cloth was lying in a crumpled heap on the floor, to the ill-concealed tutting disapproval of the Minor Augur. No help was forthcoming; it was left to Spock to discover that if the two spheres situated closest together were located in the centre of the forehead, the others would move by some telekinetic process, four of them causing the cloth to assume the shape of the wearer's head with the fifth acting as a counterweight, drawing the tail of the cloth down over the back of the neck. Suitably covered, the party passed into the high vaulted chamber of the Place of Augury.

Viewed from the inside, the purpose of the transparent dome was now apparent. The glass had been optically treated, giving it the property of converting all light to a common intensity. Now the brilliant white star Paxo could be viewed without discomfort while at the same time the image of Paxo III Beta, the sister planet in the binary system, was intensified, so that it too was plainly visible. The two bodies were closing on each other towards a prolonged eclipse of Paxo by its planet.

"The High Augur will enter the Place at the moment of commencement," the Minor Augur explained in reverential tones. "Once the eclipse is total it will last for exactly forty of your minutes. During this time the High Augur will read the portents which will determine which, if either, of your cultures is looked upon with favour."

Sure enough, as the two discs kissed, the floor parted and the High Augur, bare-headed - and indeed naked save for a kind of king-sized Humility Cloth around his midriff - rose solemnly upwards into the chamber. The event was so unexpected and in its effect so bizarre that there was a chorus of guffaws from the assembled Klingons and even the well disciplined crew of the Enterprise gave vent to titters, accompanied by "Enter the Demon King!" muttered with a pronounced Russian accent. The situation was saved by Spock, who turned and gave a look of such cold intensity that even the irrepressible Chekov fell silent.

The Minor Augur removed the cloth from his head with a flourish and nodded in reply to Kirk's unspoken question. Heads were swiftly uncovered. Fortunately for good order and discipline the High Augur, whose Humility Cloth was very strategically placed, did not follow suit. Instead he spoke, so softly as to be inaudible beyond the first few rows.

"The Augury begins. You may sit."

For a while there was only the steady darkening of the white star as the eclipse progressed, accompanied by the subdued coughs and whisperings of nine hundred assembled people. Since the Paxoans were talking quietly among themselves, Kirk ventured to ask his Science Officer a question. "How can one eclipse last that long, Spock? The planetary disc is larger than the star, but surely not that much larger."

"If my memory serves me correctly, Captain, the motion of Paxo Beta relative to Paxo Alpha where we are now, is elliptical and in the reverse direction to that of our joint orbit around the star. At present the secondary planet is travelling away from us towards its sun, but midway through the eclipse the process will reverse and the two planets will begin to close on one another again. Consequently the apparent motion is unusually slow."

"Captain," put in Chekov. "What did he mean, signs and portents? And what happens if... nothing happens?"

"We must just wait and see, Mr. Chekov. Rest assured, though - something will happen."

The eclipse became total.

For perhaps twenty seconds after the last vestiges of light from Paxo were extinguished, total darkness reigned. Then the black shadow of Paxo Beta shimmered, illuminated briefly and became a panoply of stars, brighter than those in the surrounding sky and of a different, alien pattern. At first the picture seemed to be still, but then one star detached itself from the rest. It grew swiftly into a Federation Starship, flashing across the picture in the sky before disappearing into a far cosmic horizon. A strange heavenly music filled the Augury Chamber and above it rose a voice, curiously akin to Kirk's own but with a cruel and chilling timbre.

"SPACE," it said.

"THE LAST BONANZA

"THESE ARE THE VOYAGES OF THE STARSHIP - SAUCY SUE

"ITS FIVE YEAR MISSION:

"TO PLUNDER RICH NEW WORLDS

"TO ENSLAVE NEW LIFE AND NEW CIVILISATIONS

"TO COLDLY DO WHAT NO MAN HAS DONE BEFORE"

The 'picture' fogged; cleared; formed itself into an image of the Enterprise proceeding at warp speed through a close-packed star system in pursuit of another vessel. The Enterprise... and yet *not* the Enterprise; the number NCC 1701 was plainly visible on the main pods, but on the superstructure, boldly picked out between a blood-red Jolly Roger and that same number NCC 1701, was emblazoned the name - SAUCY SUE.

The picture changed again, to the starship's bridge. On it, Captain Kirk - or was it Captain Kirk? - was staring intently at the freighter's image on the viewing screen, a sadistic little smile on his lips and an expression of inordinate greed in his eyes. He turned to the communications station, where sat a beautiful black woman wearing only the briefest of red G-strings. "Open a hailing frequency, Lieutenant."

"Hailing frequency open, sir."

"Angela B. This is Captain Kermit S. Jak of the Federation Starship Saucy Sue."

The scene cut briefly to the control room of the freighter and the air was filled with panic-stricken cries of "Black Jak!"

"Heave to and prepare to receive a boarding party. Your cargo is confiscated and will be transferred to my ship."

The freighter's captain tried to put a bold face on things. "You are mistaken, Captain. This is the Terran freighter Sunderland, en route for Altair to pick up a cargo of sponge fruit. We are carrying nothing but worthless ballast."

Captain Jak was unimpressed. "Report, Mr. Pocks?"

The Science Officer looked up from his console. "Angela B, freighter, carrying out an unauthorised trade in platinum-dilithium alloy, and smuggling illegal immigrants to the rebel colony on Tamar 7."

"You see, Captain? Nothing escapes detection by our sensors. And the law is most specific. All dilithium trade is the monopoly of the Federation, to whom illicit dilithium is forfeit. The platinum with which it is alloyed will be separated out and put to - " (he smiled greedily at Pocks, who smiled back) - "other uses."

"But Captain - "

Jak's face hardened. "Enough. Mr. Uslu, arm photon torpedoes."

"Torpedoes armed and ready, sir."

"Fire on the count of zero. Five. Four. Three. Two. One."

"WAIT!" The cry was so loud that it caused the listeners in the Place of Augury to wince in pain. "Very well, Captain, you leave us no choice."

There was a break in the story, denoted by a few seconds of true darkness in the location of the eclipsed Paxo. Once more Jak hailed the freighter.

"Now to ensure your good behaviour, you will offload all women and children into your lifecraft. We will tow it by tractor beam until we are well out of this sector. Then - if you have been good - we will send you the co-ordinates for its recovery. But if I hear as much as a squawk on the distress frequencies - they will be left to rot."

The freighter's captain held up his hands in a gesture of helplessness but gave the order. The lifecraft pulled away, to be grasped by the Saucy Sue's tractors. When it was clear -

"Mr. Uslu. You know what to do."

The oriental face at the helm assumed a look of unspeakable evil. "Aye, aye, sir."

The blinding bolt of a single photon torpedo struck the Saucy Sue's unshielded victim squarely amidships, instantly vapourising her. And there was worse to come.

"Diffused phasers, sir?"

"Of course."

The ship's phaser banks, diffused into a thousand needle-sharp rays of incredible power, punched a thousand tiny holes in the pressure hull of the lifecraft. Many of those aboard it sustained direct hits and died instantly. They were the lucky ones. As the escaping air, acting as a low-powered rocket bank, drove the lifecraft steadily away from the Saucy Sue, the picture cut to its interior, showing harrowing scenes of its doomed passengers gasping for air, amid the cheers of Black Jak and his crew.

In the Place of Augury, Jim Kirk and *his* crew were not cheering. All of them were on their feet, shaking with anger and preparing to walk out.

The High Augur, quite unhurriedly, turned to face them. And said, in a terrible voice,

"Remain seated."

With those two words he was transformed from a comic figure in a none-too-adequate loincloth, into an awesome being of power and authority. The crew of the Enterprise was forced to watch to the bitter end the parodies of themselves in the sky, proceeding from one act of bestial cruelty to another, punctuated with periods of 'celebration' ranging from mild debauchery to the depths of depravity.

When at last it was over and the first rays of sunlight from Paxo stabbed outwards from behind the eclipse, the Klingon commander seized his opportunity. Throwing out his arms towards the High Augur in a theatrical gesture of supplication he cried out, "You see? You see? At last, the Federation exposed - in the very acts of which they unjustly accuse us!"

Kirk held his tongue until the jeers of the Klingons died down. Then he said quietly, with all the authority he could muster, "That is not my ship. And those - animals - were not my crew."

Commander Lung positively sneered. "So you say, Captain Jak. Oh, I do beg your pardon. Captain Kirk. But can you prove it?"

"Yes, I believe I can." Kirk turned to the High Augur. "Your Excellency, can your viewing dome pick up the image of my ship?"

The High Augur did not speak, but made a sign. The Enterprise, in synchronous orbit overhead, was picked out as an enhanced speck of light and magnified until it was of comfortable viewing size. Kirk flipped open his communicator.

"Kirk to Enterprise."

"Sulu here, Captain."

"I want you to rotate the ship through ninety degrees."

"Eighty eight point seven," said Spock quietly.

"Correction. Through eighty eight point seven degrees, around the fore-aft axis. We want to be able to read her name from the planetary surface."

"Aye, aye, sir," Sulu said expressionlessly, having long since given up being surprised by any request from his Captain.

"And Sulu - be careful not to spin her."

"Aye, aye, sir," said Sulu again, sounding just slightly pained, as if

to say that the best starship helmsman in Starfleet was not in the habit of getting into spins. He carried out the manoeuvre impeccably, rotating the Enterprise through precisely eighty eight point seven degrees, until he proof was there for all to see. The number, NCC 1701. The emblem on the upper phaser banks. And the name.

SAUCY SUE.

The brig of the Klingon pursuit cruiser Krayda'ak was cold and stark and uncomfortable. The sole light was a blue luminescence emanating from the walls and ceiling. The air was blue too; the cell was filled with an unbroken succession of unprintable Scottish oaths punctuated with the occasional apology and, when she could get a word in edgeways, Deputy Science Officer Kinshaw's assurances that "it didn't matter in the least, Mr. Scott, because two years at the Starfleet Technical College made you very broadminded."

The two visitors had materialised in the Krayda'ak's transporter room, communicators open in their hands ready to report the slightest sign of treachery. The room was empty. The pair moved cautiously out of the transporter bay, never thinking to look behind them. The first inkling they had of the ambush was when they were seized from behind; their captors had transported from another part of the vessel. Their communicators had been dashed from their hands and almost before they knew it they were cooling their heels in the brig, with the four hefty guards outside its open doorway turning deaf ears to all their protests.

It was almost an hour before the tramp of marching feet heralded the arrival of a Klingon prisoner, borne along by four more guards. All four guards were heavily garbed in protective plastic clothing and the party was under the personal direction of the Klingon commander, Lung.

"Execution party - halt!"

Lung looked the condemned man up and down, savouring the terrified face, which was ashen even under the characteristic metallic bronze of the Klingon complexion. "Proceed with the execution."

Two of the escort seized the prisoner by the arms and propelled him towards the doorway of the brig. As his fingertips crossed the threshold a bolt of lightning flashed along his arm, encompassing his whole body, which shuddered convulsively before collapsing in an untidy heap, steaming faintly.

Lung smiled mirthlessly at the brig's two occupants. "A small object lesson. I - and most of my crew - must leave now to attend this farce on the planet. I cannot spare you any guards, but I would prefer you to remain alive in case I am required to produce you for the Paxoans' inspection. You will be fed at intervals." He indicated a synthesizer cabinet, a crude copy of the one on the Enterprise. "Provided you do not try to escape, you will be quite safe until I return. After that, your fate will be of no great significance. By then the Enterprise will be safely in our hands."

"And how are ye going to achieve that, ye evil shiny beastie? Ye canna kill the whole crew."

Lung yawned languidly. "Do you take me for a barbarian, Mr. Scott? There will be no need for violence. When your crewmates try to beam you to the Enterprise, we will simply divert them... elsewhere. Where you will be reunited. Then you will be able to vilify me at your leisure, while you

wait for another starship to come and rescue you."

"Rescue us? From where?"

"Oh, did I not make that clear? From Beta, of course. Where else?"

"Why you murdering - " Scott launched into another colourful description of the Klingons and their ancestry, a tirade which was largely wasted since long before he had run out of oaths Lung and his thugs had departed for their rendezvous with the Minor Augur on Beta Alpha.

"I don't understand," said D.S.O. Kinshaw when Scott had simmered down. "I mean, I know we can't let them capture the Enterprise, but they did say they wouldn't harm us."

The Chief Engineer looked at her blankly. "Ye mean ye havena' heard?"

"Heard? Heard what?"

"The rumours about Paxo Beta." The D.S.O. shook her head as Scott went on grimly, "They're calling it 'the death planet'."

The unexpected manoeuvre completed, Sulu and Dr. McCoy were able to return to their game. In the doctor's eyes there lurked a faint gleam of anticipation. *Is it possible*, he asked himself, *that the interruption has broken Sulu's concentration?* It certainly seemed so; the location of his opponent's last black pebble was so unexpected that he could hardly believe his eyes. Surely Sulu could see the trap his present game was laying for himself? But the helmsman's face was as impassive as the most inscrutable of his Japanese ancestors. Willing his hand to stay steady, McCoy selected a white pebble from the bowl in front of him and placed it on the board, a faint in one direction while the jaws of the trap were closing in another. At last - Sulu the invincible was going down to defeat!

"So you really hardly know Japan?" McCoy said. "You surprise me, Mr. Suly. I always assumed, after you scared the daylights out of us with the Samurai act, that you were as versed in Japanese lore as - well, as Spock is in Vulcan."

"In Japanese lore, of course, Doctor. My father taught me all he knew, which was a great deal. But I spent much of my childhood in Hawaii." Almost absent-mindedly he laid another black pebble in position. "My father was commander of the Starfleet Communications School there. After that we were posted to Starbase Seven, and I've never spent more than a few months at a time on Earth since." He glanced casually at the white pebble with which the doctor had replied to his last move. "Even my pilot's training was done on Rigel."

"But you did study the martial arts?"

"Naturally."

"Then tell me something I've never understood. What is the difference between judo and ju-jitsu?"

Sulu picked up a final black pebble out of his bowl. He examined it thoughtfully for a moment. "Judo is to maim," he said. Placing the pebble on the board with an air of absolute finality he added, "Ju-jitsu is to kill."

McCoy looked at the board and saw with dismay that the elaborate trap

he had been baiting had been neatly turned upon himself. "Confound it all, Sulu, you've done it again!" Resignedly he disturbed the pebbles in a gesture of submission. "I don't think I'll ever have the beating of you."

Sulu grinned broadly. "You're getting better, Doctor. Even Mr. Spock only wins one game in three."

"One in two point seven seven five - approximately - if I know Spock," growled McCoy. They both laughed.

"Another game?"

"No, thank you. Three thrashings is enough for one day. What the - ?"

He broke off sharply and both men swivelled in their seats towards the source of the disturbance.

In the bridge doorway stood Ensign Potato of Security, a glassy expression on his face. He was accompanied by two identical Klingons, each a perfect likeness of Commander Lung. When he spoke it was with a terrible effort, as if fighting a will many times stronger than his own.

"Don't... look... at... their... eyes."

His warning came too late. Both men were instantly mesmerised, the icy blue stares dragging their minds into the heads of the Klingons, there to be subjugated to their wills. There was no sensation, save for a mild surprise at finding that the 'Klingons' were not Klingons at all but androids; walking hypnosis machines, highly sophisticated but devilishly effective, fashioned by some quirk of vanity into the image of Command Lung. Their control was total; though still fully aware of their own identities, McCoy and Sulu were mental prisoners, powerless to resist.

The Enterprise was, as Lung had predicted, safely in Klingon hands.

The Sacrificial Anode was as unlike the High Augur as it was possible to be. Whereas the Augur was short and tubby, the Anode was seven feet tall and skeletally thin. In contrast to the Augur's simple loin-cloth the Anode was dressed in sumptuous robes of blue and gold, while on his head was a tall golden helmet studded with sapphires.

In front of him, on two golden thrones, sat Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock. Each was secured by a blue metallic strap buckled at the back. Their hands were left free.

"What have you done with my crew?" Kirk demanded when the Augur had removed the gag from his mouth.

"They are penned in the Place of Anticipation, Captain. Awaiting the result of your trial."

"I demand that you honour the terms of the agreement and return us all to the Enterprise."

The Sacrificial Anode stared down at him, loftily.

"You are in no position to demand anything, Captain. You have challenged the Omens and the matter must be put to the test. You will be transported to the Holy Planet Beta, whose Auguries you have denied. These you will stay for a day and a night. If you are alive when you return, it

means that Beta has accepted the justice of your challenge. Transportation will take place in one milliday." He glided elegantly from the room.

The Minor Augur, lingering behind, said, "Do not raise your hopes too high, Captain. The Auguries are never wrong."

"You mean nobody returns alive?"

"As yet, no."

"Of what do they die?"

"Why, Beta kills then, Mr. Spock."

"How, precisely?"

"No-one knows. Their bodies are unmarked, save usually for slight bruising on the hands or neck. There is oxygen in the lungs and no foreign organism in the bloodstream. Yet - they are dead."

Spock would have pressed the point further, but the Minor Augur held up his hand in a gesture for silence. "Enough. It is time." The two thrones and their occupants were dematerialised and, after a prolonged pause, rematerialised on the surface of Beta.

Spock and Kirk found themselves in an alien landscape, weird but compellingly beautiful. Soft rolling downs, carpeted with a purplish grass-like vegetation and dotted with pale yellow flowers. Distant hills in a deeper purple were hazily visible in the soft light of early morning, while at their backs was a low overhanging cliff of the same purple and brown rock. The air was softly fragrant and filled with unflustered sounds; bird songs, mixed with the faint chirp of tiny insect-like creatures and an intermittent silky rustling of something emerging from a cleft in the rocks and slithering across the ground towards the intruders.

It was Spock who saw it first. "Captain - look!"

The serpent was eight feet long and somewhat thicker in girth than any snake of comparable length would have been on Earth. The extra thickness was needed to support an exceptionally large head, from which two intelligent eyes regarded Mr. Spock gravely. Then the creature extended two short blunt fangs, leaned forward - and bit him in the neck.

"I don't know about you, Mr. Scott, but I'm starving."

The words were no sooner out of D.S.O. Kinshaw's mouth than there was a buzzing from the food cabinet and its door slid open, revealing a whole small haggis and a medium-sized avocado stuffed with crab mayonnaise and, incongruously, a raspberry on the top. By way of cutlery there was a small plastic spoon with a metal handle.

Opening a haggis with a plastic spoon is far from easy. It took Mr. Scott quite a while, poking a small hole in the skin with the blunt point of the spoon's handle, enlarging it, then finally extracting a spoonful of the contents. He put it in his mouth, chewed thoughtfully, and spat it out in disgust.

"My, it's awful!" he exclaimed. "Has naeboddy told yon heathen sassenachs you're supposed to cook haggis? It tastes like raw oats soused in salt sheep's piss - sorry, lassie."

D.S.O. Kinshaw, who had once tasted haggis at a Burns Supper organised by the Engineering Department as a surprise for its Chief, privately considered that a very fair description of the genuine article, but was wise enough not to say so. Instead she munched purposefully away at the 'avocado', which bore more than a passing resemblance to raw turnip stuffed with boiled shredded coconut and with a dollop or two of cod liver oil to give it flavour. It was revolting, but it was food of a sort and she succeeded in getting it all down.

Scott took a final sniff at the 'haggis' then lobbed it - and the spoon - contemptuously through the doorway, causing a very satisfactory flash as they penetrated the lethal field. The two lapsed into gloomy silence for a while, until -

"That's odd."

"What's that, lassie?"

The D.S.O. pointed through the doorway of the brig. Next to the smouldering remains of the spoon sat the haggis, grey, bloated and quite unharmed.

"Now why shouldn't the haggis get fried along with the spoon?" she said. "Do you know what I think? I think the ray field only reacts to metal. And the execution was staged to make us think we were trapped in here, to stop us from just walking out."

"The Klingon died," Scott pointed out.

"Yes, he did, didn't he. Hmm." The D.S.O. thought about it some more. "Got it! The Klingons have traces of free metal in their pigmentation. That'll be what gives them that bronze look. This brig was built to house Klingon prisoners. It probably never occurred to the ship's designers that the field wouldn't be lethal to other life forms. We can just walk out. Come on."

"Wait!" cried Scott. He was wasting his breath. The D.S.O., impetuous as ever, had dashed through the doorway and was already half way down the corridor. Scott, more cautious, checked his clothing for any trace of metal, and followed her.

"Four of them," the Chief Engineer whispered after taking a cautious peep through the bridge doorway. "And probably a few more in the sick bay. They won't have landed their medical grades either."

"If only we had phasers."

Scott looked scornful. "Did ye no' hear me? I said there's only four of them. I don't need phasers to put yon four beasties to sleep! Lassie, I was on the terraces at the famous Rangers-Celtic match on Ibrox IV." A wistful look came into his eyes. "That was a real fight. This'll be just a skirmish! Stand back now." He gave a wild Gaelic warcry and dashed onto the bridge, fists flying. The four Klingons were soon sleeping peacefully. "Now all we have to do is warn the Enterprise."

Which proved to be easier said than done. Communications, along with all the ship's other functions, had been placed under the control of the Krayda'ak's computers. To make matters worse, the Klingon vessel had been broken out of orbit and was now circling Paxo somewhere beyond its outermost planet, Paxo XIII.

"I don't think I can, Mr. Scott." The D.S.O. looked up from the computer's circuitry, despair on her face. "It's so... alien!"

Scott smiled encouragingly. "You can do it, lassie," he said. "Dinna tell him I told you, but Mr. Spock said the other day that you could make any computer play a symphony."

"That's as may be," said the D.S.O. grimly. "But this is like trying to play Mozart on the bagpi -. Oh, gosh. I mean - "

"I ken very well what ye mean," said Scott, a trifle huffily, as the D.S.O., to hide her confusion, dived back into the central processor. Soon she was chattering cheerfully to herself. "A touch of contra-logic, I think. Yes, that's it!" A few minutes later, she emerged triumphantly. "Try it now, Mr. Scott."

Whatever contra-logic was, it must have worked, because the Krayda'ak responded obediently to Scott's order and, with a quick blip of the Klingon equivalent of warp drive, rejoined the Enterprise in orbit around the twin planets.

"Krayda'ak to Enterprise. This is Lieutenant-Commander Scott calling Enterprise. Come in, please."

The message went unacknowledged, save for a single perfect shot from the Enterprise's lower phaser bank, which struck the Krayda'ak squarely amidships.

Spock's left hand lashed across his chest and grabbed the snake at the base of its massive head. A succession of conflicting expressions flitted across his face; an expression of sadness; bewilderment; surprise; unbounded joy; finally intense concentration as two minds became one. The mind meld remained unbroken for five full minutes, until that part of Spock which remained conscious of his surroundings saw something alarming; a second snake about to join minds with Kirk in the same fashion. An instant of even greater concentration followed, then Spock's snake raised its tail and guided its partner's head away from Kirk's neck to Spock's right hand. Now three minds became one and remained so for a few seconds, until something miraculous happened; Spock returned to full awareness, leaving the two snakes in ecstatic communication with each other through a single unused channel of his mind.

Kirk allowed Spock a few moments to collect himself before asking, "Spock, what's going on?"

Even then, Spock didn't appear to hear him. "Oh, the waste!" he said. "The tragic waste. An intellect like that trapped in a life form that cannot realise its potential." He fell silent. Kirk said nothing, waiting for his Science Officer to explain in his own good time.

"These creatures have perhaps the eighth - no, the ninth - highest order of intelligence in the known galaxy. Yet because they have almost no means of communicating with each other, or of storing accumulated knowledge, they have been forced to stagnate for many thousands of years. Imagine a mind superior to yours, even - forgive me - to mine, in a body with no telepathic capability, no vocal cords with which to form speech, not even arms or digits to develop sign language."

Kirk latched quickly on to the key phrase. "Almost no means of communication?"

"The blunt fang-like protruberances are a form of external antennae. Through them one of these creatures can transmit thoughts to any other life form with which it makes contact. But it cannot receive thoughts in return. Therefore, for two of the creatures to communicate with each other, double contact is necessary."

"Then I don't understand the problem"

"Simply this, Captain. Some two hours after contact is made, both creatures - invariably - die."

Kirk's face registered concern. "Then you - "

"I think not, Jim. The serpents die of some disease, transmission of which is a consequence of the physical contact involved. Deaths among aliens with whom contact is made occur within minutes, from quite another cause. That did not happen in my case because I was able to complete the circuit using the Vulcan mind meld."

"Then what - ?"

"You must understand the loneliness of these creatures, denied vent to their thoughts or their creativity. In any attempted contact their first emissions would be waves of pure emotion, magnified by bitter disappointment at finding their partners incapable of response."

"Spock, just tell me in plain English - what did the other 'examinees' die of?"

Spock raised an eyebrow. "Surely that is obvious, Captain. They died of unutterable - sadness." His face became expressionless again as he communed briefly with the two serpents. Then -

"They have picked up the gist of what we have been saying. Apparently there is a belief - a form of race memory - that it was not always so. This... disease... has developed over many hundreds of centuries. Our second priority, therefore, must be to have Dr. McCoy isolate its cause."

Kirk laughed aloud. "That'll please Bones. I can hear him now. 'I'm a doctor, not a snake charmer!' By the way, what would you say is our first priority?"

"I would suggest, Cptain, to find a way to contact the Enterprise."

Even as he spoke, the problem resolved itself. A communicator materialised a couple of inches in front of Kirk's chest, and dropped neatly into his lap.

For the first time in his life, Sulu understood the true meaning of madness. It was as if his persona was split neatly in two, each half aware of the other, fighting the other, seeking to dominate the other; the Sulu of the Enterprise, Pilot-helmsman, key member of the finest starship crew in the Fleet, hearing clearly and understanding the panicky cry over the Krayda'ak's hailing frequency.

"Mr. Sulu, it's me, Kinshaw. Kinshaw and Scott! Cease firing!"

This Sulu responded with ice cold precision, sending messages to his sensitive pilot's fingers instructing him to disarm the photon torpedoes which were preparing to deliver the final blow to the crippled Krayda'ak. But the fingers refused to respond because they were under the control of

the other, new Sulu - the Klingon-Samurai, whose mind was hammering out the insistent message. "Judo is to maim. Ju-jitsu is to kill."

He must have spoken the last words aloud, "Ju-jitsu is to kill," because both McCoy and Potato, each fighting a similar battle of his own, reacted to them. Of the two, Potato's was the stronger reaction. With a mighty effort he shook himself free of the androids' domination, reaching out with every ounce of his huge strength and crashing their two heads together, crushing them like eggshells. But not before their combined wills turned their full fury on him, mashing his mind to nothingness.

For a few precious moments, all was confusion. The computer, reacting to conflicting orders, dropped the shields, while at the same time continuing to prepare the torpedoes for firing. The Krayda'ak's sensors, divining the Enterprise's changed status, flashed the information to her computer which in turn passed it, in execrable English, to Scott and D.S.O. Kinshaw. Seeing the anguish on the Chief's face, the D.S.O. said, "We've no choice, Mr. Scott. You heard what Lung said. It's the lives of the whole crew against those few still aboard her." Turning directly to the computer, she said, steadily but with a catch in her voice, "Fire!"

But in the few seconds before either ship could fire, a salvo of torpedoes from a third vessel vapourised the Krayda'ak as if she had never been.

"Welcome aboard, Mr. Scott. You too, Miss Kinshaw. Or should I say Miss Chinwiska?"

The D.S.O. had never met Admiral Riley, but she knew an Admiral's stars when she saw them. "Thank you, sir. Er - aboard where?"

"This is the U.S.S. Challenger, NCC 2099. I'm sorry we had to beam you across so precipitately. We would have liked the Krayda'ak intact, but when the Enterprise dropped her shields our monitors reported that her crew had retaken control. Your salvo would have destroyed her."

Scott had a dozen follow-up questions, but the Admiral held up his hand. "Explanations in a minute or two, Mr. Scott. I don't want to have to go through everything twice." Turning to the Challenger's transporter chief he snapped, "Energise."

Kirk and Spock were beamed aboard, still strapped onto their golden thrones.

Explanations were delayed for much more than a minute or two. There was a boarding party to be beamed across to the Enterprise, and an anxious Kirk to be patched through to her bridge. Sulu gave him a terse account of what had happened, culminating in Potato's heroic destruction of the Klingon androids.

"And Potato?" Kirk enquired when Sulu had finished.

Dr. McCoy looked up helplessly from beside the Irish Security Officer's prostrate form. "There's nothing I can do. He's dead, Jim."

Then came the debriefing.

As the D.S.O. had correctly surmised from Admiral Riley's use of her alter ego's name, the 'Saucy Sue' broadcast had originated from the Challenger. The full version as seen from the Place of Augury had been holographically projected in front of the eclipsed Beta, sound being

provided by the Challenger's planetary hailers. "The excerpt you intercepted," the Admiral concluded, "was of course a dress rehearsal."

There was an air of expectancy. Kirk gave it voice.

"I think what we'd all like to know, Admiral, is - why?"

With maddening slowness, Admiral Riley took out a well-worn briar pipe, filled it with a mixture of Terran tobacco and Antarean sparta-grass, and applied a light. (Many Starship Captains forbade smoking completely, but Rank Hath its Privileges.) Spock watched the process with an expression of utter disbelief.

Only when the pipe was drawing nicely was the Admiral ready to continue.

"When the Augury was originally proposed as a means of determining which bloc Paxo Alpha would join, we were happy to go along with it. There was little risk of losing, because the formalised and ritualistic nature of the Paxoan culture made it certain that the Klingons would go down, if only on sheer bad manners.

"But then the U.S.S. Discovery, which carried out the preliminary negotiations, reported something very disturbing. While in orbit she routinely surveyed the sister planet, which was supposed to be uninhabited, and discovered readings showing an undeveloped intelligence of an extremely high order.

"This changed things completely. We knew that anyone incurring the High Augur's displeasure was likely to be despatched to Beta as a sacrifice. If as a result the Klingons gained control of Beta and its untapped genius - whatever it might be - the possibilities were unthinkable. It would be like letting a brilliant but disturbed adolescent lose on a powerful computer which would accept any programming, however lunatic. Far from winning the Augury, we had to make sure that the Federation lost it. We also thought it might be useful to put a Vulcan on Beta, in case the Vulcan mind meld proved to be the only way of making contact. So we called the Enterprise in to Starbase Nine for an 'inspection' of her upper phaser banks - during which time her name happened to get painted out and changed. Then we compiled the little pantomime we showed at the Augury, and stood by ready to take you off Beta in case you found something you couldn't handle. Now it only remains to return you to Alpha at the appointed time."

The D.S.O. turned to her chief, astonished. "You're going back?"

"Naturally."

"But why, for goodness' sake?"

Spock looked at her reprovingly. "It is the only logical course. For one thing, it is necessary in order to secure the release of the rest of the crew without revealing the Challenger's presence. More importantly, to deliver the words of Beta to the hierarchy on Alpha, in order to ensure that its... people... are able to develop undisturbed."

"Beta will decree absolute privacy," added Kirk. "No Paxoans, no Terrans, and definitely no Klingons." His face broke into a broad smile. "Must say, I can't wait to see the expression on the Anode's face when we reappear alive and well. It should be - " (he caught Spock's eye) - "fascinating!"

The last of the crew have beamed up from Paxo Alpha and the Enterprise is preparing to warp out of orbit. The Challenger is remaining to deal with the Klingons. Mr. Spock and Dr. McCoy have returned from a further landing on Paxo Beta and their report is appended to this entry.

Dr. Leonard McCoy entered the bridge looking decidedly smug. "It worked, Jim!"

"Very good, doctor. Please make your report for the record."

McCoy faced the computer log.

"As I suspected, the Serpents have an anomaly in their biochemistry affecting the constituents of their blood supply. They do not have blood groups as such; each creature's blood is unique to itself. Even traces of blood transfused from another is fatal within hours. The soft points of the antennae through which they communicate have become contaminated over the years with micro-organisms. These trigger a chemical change in the surface of the skin, turning it into an osmotic membrane through which blood diffuses from one creature to the other, with fatal results. A simple antibiotic and antiseptic will take care of the immediate problem and an oral vaccine will prevent a recurrence. Plentiful supplies of both have been prepared, and the creatures are now able to communicate freely. McCoy out."

"Well done, Bones," Kirk congratulated him when the recording was finished.

McCoy shrugged modestly. "It was nothing, Jim."

"A simple application of medical logic," nodded Spock.

"Dammit, Spock, did you *have* to agree with me?"

Kirk stepped in swiftly. "Starfleet has recommenced that the creatures should be contacted again in fifty years' time, to monitor progress. Who knows what strides they will have made by then, Mr. Spock?"

"Who, indeed, Captain. But it is my belief that *they* will contact us long before that."

Sulu's excited voice broke in. "I think they already have, Mr. Spock. Look!" He pointed to the main screen, which was showing a closeup of Beta's surface. About a hundred of the creatures had combined to form a message in Vulcan script. Recognising it, Jim Kirk asked, "What does it say, Mr. Spock?"

"Roughly translated, Captain, it says, 'Thank you for all eternity.'"

McCoy glowered at him. "Spock, how do you do it? I do all the work and you get the thanks."

Spock raised both eyebrows in the expression of maddening superiority that McCoy had come to dread. "There is no need to be offended, Doctor. These creatures' first outside contact was with a perfectly logical mind, and it is natural for some of the logic to have been assimilated. There are, I perceive, one hundred and three of them in that group. To spell out the same message in any Terran language would require a minimum of... one hundred and twelve."

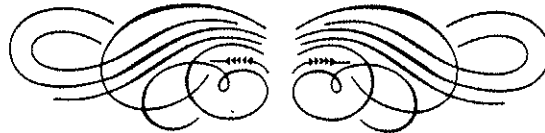
Kirk looked at the pair of them and shook his head in mock despair.
"Take us out of orbit, Mr. Sulu. Ahead - warp factor two."

* * * * *

But is Ensign Potato *really* dead - or is he *undead*? Watch out for the spine-chilling sequel to The Serpents of Paxo Beta -

THE IRISH VAMPIRE

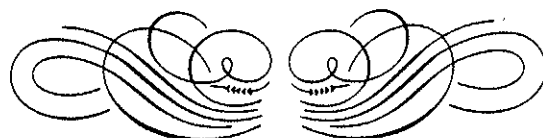
The Irish Vampire will be printed in ENTERPRISE-LOG ENTRIES 67



THE VULCAN MASK

Their hands reach out to me
As if to someone who is drowning
As if I am inside a trap
And they would set me free.
They will not understand
Why I cannot be like them.
Do they think I shed, like a suit of clothes,
This Vulcan shell that is me?
If I bid *them* change to Vulcans
And cast off *their* fierce emotions
How many of them could - or would -
Enclose their hearts in steel?
They should understand when I tell them this
So why can they not see it?
That I dare not drop the Vulcan mask
And show that I can feel!
I am resigned to what I am.
The die is cast - unchanging.
Let me tread the path I chose
After I faced the Kas-wan trial.
I am content within myself
Until you prise me open.
Take me as I am, but judge me not
Because I cannot smile.

SHERYL PETERSON



The Secret Belly Dancers of the Enterprise

by

HELEN DAVISON

(for Beryl Hodgson)

Ensign Jasmine stepped into her room and looked around her; she was alone, her room mate being down in the recreation room. She let her hair down and quickly removed from a bottom drawer two pieces of chiffon. In her mind, the room changed; where before there had been beds and bedroom fitments, there were now low sofas and cushions. She changed into a dancing costume, put on a recording of music that suited her mood, and began to dance seductively to it. For this was Ensign Jasmine's deep secret. Here in the privacy of her room she became another girl - a Belly Dancer. As she indulged in her fantasy she did not hear the door open.

Ensign Rita stood there in amazement at the sight. Here was her room mate Ensign Jasmine transformed. The normally quiet, introvert girl had become a daring, mysterious lady dancing to an invisible audience. The music ended, and the spell was broken.

"Why do you do it?"

"To keep myself fit. My mother used to do it and so did my grandmother before her. Do you want to try?"

"Well... "

"Come on - it's easy."

Ensign Rita reluctantly gave in. Soon she found herself enjoying it. She faltered a bit and got it wrong, and the two girls collapsed onto their beds in giggles.

For the next few months the girls would slip out of the recreation room unnoticed to dance for a while. Ensign Rita scrounged from stores enough chiffon for her costume. The two girls had fun with their exercises.

One day during their duty time the girls met in a corridor as they were going about their duties. Ensign Jasmine gave Ensign Rita a greeting by flicking her hips, and Ensign Rita mimicked her. They parted, giggling, as they noticed the startled looks from other crew members. From that day every time they met in a corridor they greeted each other with a hip movement. Most of the rest of the crew soon got used to their strange behaviour.

One day Captain Kirk happened to be going down the corridor as the two ensigns met. He was amazed at the sight of the two girls wiggling their hips at each other. He looked around to observe the reaction of other members of his crew to this strange behaviour, but they were just smiling. Kirk continued on his way, puzzled, and soon forgot the incident.

A month passed, and again he happened to be in the corridor when the two girls met. They again greeted each other with their hips, and passed on giggling.

This time Kirk decided to find out about this strange behaviour. Asking around, he found out the names of the two ensigns. He decided to consult Dr. McCoy and see what he had to say about the two girls. He went to sickbay.

"Bones, what do you know about Ensign Jamel and Ensign York? I've just seen them in the corridor."

"Not much. I had both girls in about a month ago after I noticed the way they behave. They are both sound in body and mind. I don't know why they do it. It seems as though they have a secret, and that is their signal to each other."

"Hmm. I still intend to get to the bottom of it. May I use your computer link?"

"Yes, of course. I wouldn't worry about those two - it's probably quite harmless. Ensign Jasmine is a quiet thing - I doubt if she would be involved in anything too bad. Ensign Rita, though she is more open, is just the same really."

"You could be right, Bones; but still, I do want to find out. Ah, here we are. Ensign Jasmine Jamel is the Engineering Messenger, Ensign Rita York is the Personnel Messenger. They share the same room, No. 38, Deck 5."

"What do you intend to do?"

"Pay those two a visit while they are indulging in their secret."

After further enquiries Kirk found out that the two girls came off duty at the same time. He followed them to the rec room, and to cover the fact that he was following them began a conversation with Spock. However, he became so involved that he found time had gone by, and the two girls had already left the recreation room when he looked round.

He beckoned to Spock, and made his way to the girls' quarters with a hurried explanation to his puzzled First Officer. Music was filtering out into the corridor from room 38.

Ah! he thought. *Now I've got you!* He knocked on the door, and when there was no reply he used his over-ride and went in.

The two girls were dressed in brief chiffon costumes and were belly dancing to the music. He stood there in amazement at the exotic sight they presented as they danced to an invisible audience.

The music switched off and the spell was broken. The two girls came back to reality, and snapped to attention as they realised that their Captain and First Officer were there.

"So this is what you two are getting up to in secret. I would far rather other members of my crew did the same, rather than some of their misdeeds! I wonder, would you two girls perform in front of an audience?"

The two girls just looked at each other.

"I mean, only if requested... like, say, special occasions. It's Dr. McCoy's birthday next month - would you perform then?"

"Yes, sir," they both answered.

"Good. Then carry on, girls. I want you 'hip movement perfect', to alter a phrase. Until then, it'll be our secret." He grinned. "I think I might even become your manager. I don't want the crew to take advantage of your unusual talent."

With Spock at his heels he left them, quite pleased with himself. What a birthday surprise Bones was going to get!

It was a month later. The girls had stage fright, but still they made their way to sickbay, their costumes in bundles under their arms. They had been relieved of duty for the day. Nurse Chapel showed them into a side ward so that they could change.

Kirk arrived as soon as the girls were ready, and went to fetch McCoy into the main ward.

Music started up, and the girls rose to the occasion as they gyrated seductively down the ward to him. McCoy's eyes nearly popped out of his head at the sight.

"By the stars, Jim, you *did* find out their secret! I wouldn't have believed it! Ensign Jasmine... Possibly Ensign Rita. Belly Dancers on the Enterprise! Whatever will the crew get up to next?"

"Happy birthday, Bones."

"Thank you, Jim."

"Think yourself lucky. The girls are only going to perform on special occasions, your birthday being the first. I've arranged for them to appear in the Christmas talent show."

"They'll take it by storm. You'll have your hands full keeping up with their performances from now on."

"They are to practice in secret, and from now on with their door locked."

McCoy and Chapel were now sworn into the girls' secret; Kirk decided that for the present it was better for the girls if no-one else knew what they were up to. Chapel sometimes had them practice in a vacant ward so that they had more room. Sometimes she watched them, acting as critic though on the whole they did not need any criticism.

A month later Kirk was in his cabin going over a pile of entry forms for the talent contest. He had received a record number of entries, and decided that the only way to handle them all was to have semi-finals, with so many from each category going into the final. He would be one of the judges for the semi-finals with Mr. Spock and Dr. McCoy as the others. A guest was coming to be the finals judge.

Lt. Uhura and Lt. Sulu, as well as the two ensigns, were already in the final. The girls were going to be put at the end of the show. They would soon wake up any judge who had fallen asleep half way through, as had happened in previous talent shows.

Kirk began to sort through the entries. There were those who believed

they could play various instruments; as well as the more common instruments like Scott and his bagpipes, others played things like spoons. One even claimed to play an instrument made up from scrap engineering parts. Others believed they could dance. *Wait until they see our two belly dancers*, Kirk thought to himself. There were the usual budding magicians or ventriloquists, one of whom had a tribble as his dummy. There were stand-up comics and acrobats. One of the entres was a juggler who juggled engineering instruments. *Wait until Scotty sees him!*

He started making piles, and soon his room was covered. McCoy entered and surveyed the chaos.

"I did knock, but you didn't answer. Whatever are you up to?"

"These are all the entries for the talent show, only I've decided there should be semi-finals as there have been so many entries this year. By the way, you are to be one of the judges for the semi-finals."

"Okay. What about our two dancers?"

"They're already in the finals. I felt we're biased towards them."

"I'll leave you to it." McCoy left, wondering how he had become involved in the judging.

A few days later the recreation corridor was blocked by a crowd of crew members all trying to read a notice board where a number of lists were pinned. A notice above them read:

Due to the large number of entries this year for the talent show, there are to be semi finals. Five from each category will go into the finals. Please look under your category to find out when you appear. Lt. Uhura, Lt. Sulu, Ensign Jamel and Ensign York are already in the finals.

"I didn't know those two had got an act. How come they're skipping the semi-finals?" asked one disgruntled performer.

"Let's go and ask them."

"No, you don't." Chapel had overheard them. "The Captain doesn't want them pestered. The reason they're straight into the finals is because the Captain and Dr. McCoy have already seen their act, and they felt it was not fair to you lot, so there's more chance for you to join them."

"What's their act?"

"You'll have to wait to find out. No-one is to pester them. The girls have been ordered to report anyone who does so to the Captain, and you could lose your chance in the show." She left them staring after her.

The semi-finals came and went, with Captain Kirk, Mr. Spock and Dr. McCoy wondering how they had managed to survive the onslaught. A few more days and it would be the finals. The Enterprise had picked up Commissioner Wallis from Starbase 30, and during their visit Kirk had granted shore leave to the crew. Nurse Chapel, Ensign Jasmine and Ensign Rita had left together and returned with small bundles under their arms. The three of them disappeared into the girls' cabin with the parcels, which contained

chains, braid and sequins to add to their costumes.

The day came. All the contestants had been given their approximate time of appearance. While the girls were getting ready Chapel appeared with two long wraps and hoods.

"Put these on and we can keep your fellow performers guessing until you're due on stage. Don't worry about your hairdos - I'll check them before you go on stage. Come on - time we got backstage."

They left and made their way down to backstage. Ensign Jasmine's costume skirt began to appear out of her wrap at the front.

"Don't worry. With any luck they'll think it's either a ballgown or a ballet tutu. Wait till they *do* see them!"

They arrived backstage. Chapel found some chairs and they settled in a corner. One of the performers approached them, but Chapel met him and spoke to him, and he went back to the group of performers he had just left.

"Better watch out, fellers. Christine has got her 'mother hen' attitude. She's likely to give you a tranquilliser shot if you get anywhere near those two."

"I wonder why they are being treated as royalty. Any idea what their act is?"

"No. The list just gives their names, 'Dance', and that their act will last two minutes."

"For a dance, that's nothing. Anyway, I suggest we add our new joke to the act - the one that involves those two."

"Right - you're on."

The show started. Act after act came and went.

"I must say, Kirk, you seem to have a good few excellent acts this year," Commissioner Wallis commented.

"We had so many entries it was easier to hold semi-finals, and we selected the best acts for today's show."

"An excellent idea. I wish one or two of the other captains did the same. Now we have a comedy duet."

The performers did various sketches, and then -

"We now come to our crew impersonations. First, Dr. McCoy and Nurse Chapel."

They were pretending to examine a patient. 'Nurse Chapel' was making sheep's eyes at the 'Doctor' and they made a mess of the examination.

"And now for the newest addition to our act. Two junior ensigns meeting in a corridor."

The comedians entered from each side of the stage and made their way to the centre. As they met they did what could only be described as a 'Big Spender' dance, then bowed and left the stage. A magician came on.

"What was *that* all about, Jim?"

"Wait and see. The two girls they were mimicking will be on later. Only a few people know what their act is like."

The show continued. Then they came to the big moment. Backstage, Chapel checked over the girls' hairdos, and ushered them towards the stage. As they got through to the wings she removed their wraps. The crowd of performers only got a back view of their costumes, so they all dived out of the room and piled around the auditorium.

The music started. The girls glided onto the stage, and a gasp went round the room at the sight of them. That did not affect the dancers - in fact, they rose to the occasion, their movements becoming more fluid and daring. The room was silent as the audience watched the two girls, entranced by the sight.

Kirk smiled - he was enjoying every moment of the enrapt silence - and he approved of the additions to the costumes. He glanced at the Commissioner. Wallis could not believe his eyes.

Those two, ensigns in Starfleet? Whatever next? Wherever did they learn to dance like that? went through his mind. By gum, they are good. No wonder Jim kept them to the end.

The girls swirled their hips and wove their spell on the stage. The audience was drawn deeper into their powerful hold. Even Mr. Spock was affected; he claimed to be a connoisseur of art... but he was amazed at how many forms Human art takes. This one... he would never have believed that two girls could create such a hold on his fellow crew members.

McCoy was thinking how much the girls had improved since his first preview of their talent.

Chekov was sure the girls had revived an ancient Russian dance.

The dance ended, the spell was broken, and the audience came to life. They clapped and cheered, whistled and called for more. The girls gave a seductive wriggle and swept off the stage.

Chapel greeted the girls, wrapped them up and led them away before the other performers returned. They locked the sickbay door. McCoy arrived, and Chapel let him in.

"You were great! I think you did it. By the way - the captain has arranged for you to have some protection for the next few days. You could be mobbed otherwise."

The intercom bleeped. "All performers to the stage. Winners are about to be announced."

"Come on, girls."

Outside the door, two security guards fell into step and followed the group.

Commissioner Wallis started to speak. "The winners are as follows. Yeoman Hastings and his talking tribble wins the variety prize."

He came forward and collected his prize.

"The singing was - as usual - won by Lt. Uhura."

She came forward to receive hers.

"The musical prize had to go to Engineer Tand and his Engineering Xylophone cum Tubular Bells. A most original performance."

Engineer Tand stepped forward, beaming.

"And now we come to the dancing. Need I say more? Never before have I seen an audience so entranced. So the prize goes to Ensign Jasmine Jamel and Ensign Rita York."

The girls came forward to claim their prize. A cheer went up.

"Stay. I will now announce the overall winners. Ensign Jasmine and Ensign Rita and their... " He leaned forward and asked the girls. "And their Belly Dance."

He handed them their trophy, and the room was in an uproar. A chant went up.

"DANCE! DANCE! DANCE!"

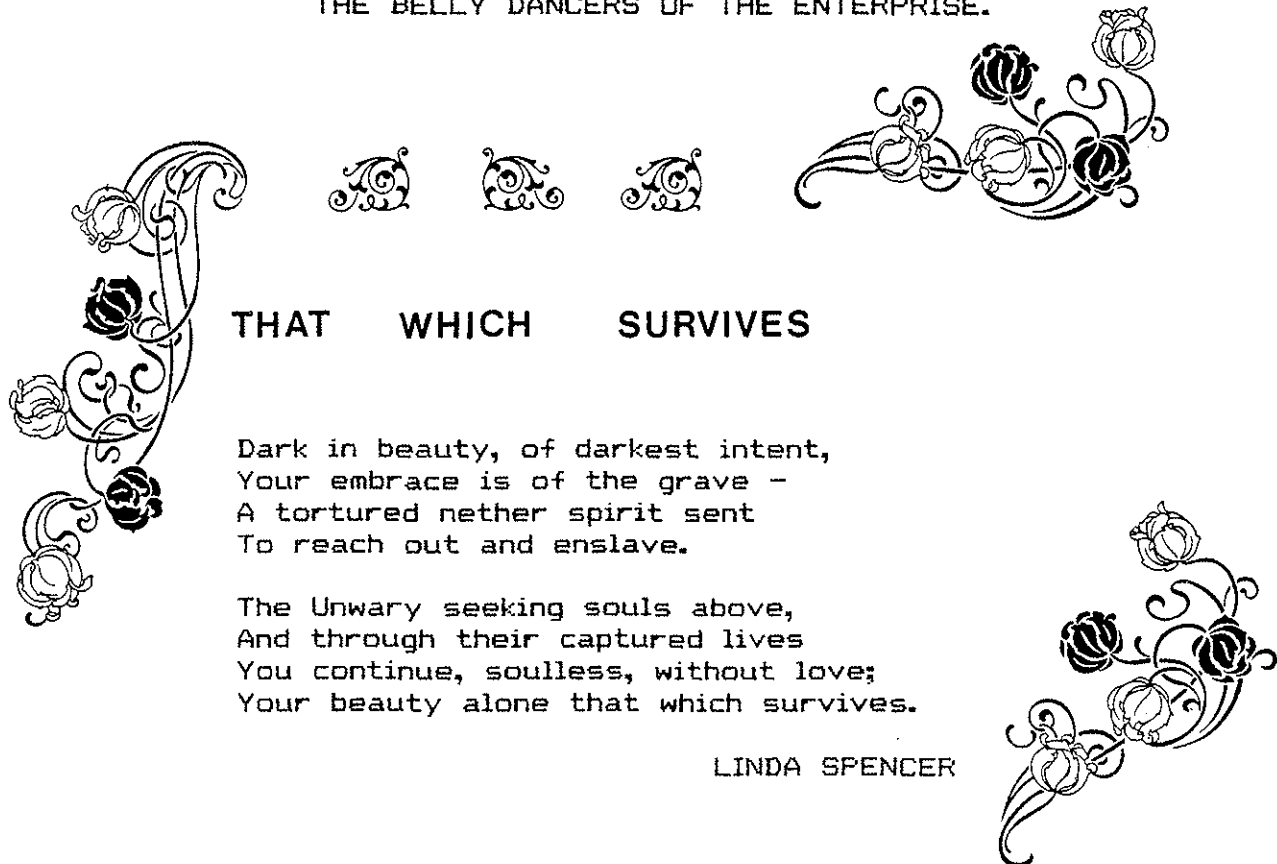
The girls glanced at Kirk. He nodded and they placed their prizes on the table and climbed onto the stage, disappearing into the wings where they dropped their wraps. Jasmine signalled for the music, and the room quietened down again.

They followed every step, every hip movement, each arm movement. Again the girls wrought their spell, and again the audience was entranced.

From that day on the girls became known as the Enterprise Belly Dancers. They wove their spell at various contests and shows. Spock still wondered how they created the effect they had on Humans. Kirk controlled their appearances, and protected them from being exploited.

So, look out for the latest attraction...

THE BELLY DANCERS OF THE ENTERPRISE.



THAT WHICH SURVIVES

Dark in beauty, of darkest intent,
Your embrace is of the grave -
A tortured nether spirit sent
To reach out and enslave.

The Unwary seeking souls above,
And through their captured lives
You continue, soulless, without love;
Your beauty alone that which survives.

LINDA SPENCER

to do What is Right

by

VICKI RICHARDS

With all the logic that his strangely befuddled brain could summon, Spock argued with the aliens as to why Kirk should not be taken away. But they didn't listen, or wouldn't, and to his increasing horror he watched helplessly as the tall, almost featureless humanoid shapes began to drag Kirk slowly away.

Kirk didn't struggle; he just hung there, making feeble movements, supported by the two huge figures who were taking him - was he affected by the same phenomenon that seemed to be preventing his own body from moving? The thought only increased the sense of hopelessness overwhelming the Vulcan, and even as he sought for the fast-receding vestiges of emotional control, he saw Kirk's mouth moving in an attempt to speak. The words wouldn't form themselves - but it didn't matter. Spock understood what he was trying to say. He wanted Spock to help. And he couldn't - he *couldn't*. The knowledge tore through the Vulcan with a vehemence he had never quite experienced before - with all the strength he could find he tried to go to Kirk, to get to him before the aliens succeeded in taking him away. And still he couldn't move.

Then a sudden insight came to him. Without fully understanding why he did it, Spock stopped fighting physically. Instincts and hunches were not his way; yet this time he acted on the merest hint of one without even thinking.

Instead, he started fighting his invisible chains with the force of his will, concentrating with all his might on how important it was for him to get to Jim and help him, and how these silent, hostile aliens could not possibly overcome either of them whatever they did. And it began to work; suddenly he found he had managed to inch forward a little; then a little further...

But it was too late - Kirk and the aliens had disappeared.

Then he found that he had been released by whatever it was that had held him. He sank to the ground, sapped of strength and purpose. The small portion of his mind that remained clear of confusion told him there was something badly wrong with him; with all of this. But he couldn't think clearly.

It must have been a force field of some kind - yet it hadn't registered on the tricorder. But then nothing had registered on it since they had left the ship.

And he didn't remember leaving the ship - or how they'd got here. In fact, he couldn't remember anything before the confrontation with the aliens except for vague recollections of himself and Kirk making their way through a country of tough, clinging brambles. And hadn't someone else been with them? McCoy - what had happened to McCoy?

He couldn't remember at all. A stab of pure fear cut through him.



With an effort equalling his battle with that which had restrained him, he forced himself towards some kind of control. The emotions were stopping him from thinking. The pain he felt...

Was that it? Was an obscure effect caused by the planet itself heightening his emotions and destroying his control? Or was it something that the aliens had done to him? Either way he had to clear his mind and *think* or he would never be able to find Kirk, much less help him.

His communicator! Why hadn't he thought of it before? Had even such a simple course of action been beyond his thought processes? Shocked to the core, he took the communicator from his belt and flipped it open.

It didn't surprise him at all to find that it was completely dead.

He rose, aware that he was thinking more clearly than he had been able to since... He wasn't certain how long it had been. The disruption of his time-sense was just one more factor to unsettle him. But he had no way of knowing how long the improvement in his thought-processes would last; some instinct told him that he was not yet recovering permanently. He had to use whatever time he had before the confusion overtook him again to the best purpose - but where to start? He hadn't even seen in which direction the aliens had taken Kirk.

Logic dictated that he should search the immediate vicinity for tracks or any other clues which might help him. If there proved to be any kind of native dwellings nearby that might prove a positive area for him to investigate. But he would have to be careful; he couldn't remember why the aliens had been hostile, or even if there had been any particular reason for their behaviour - but hostile they had undoubtedly been. He, at least, had to remain free, or there would be no-one to help Kirk or McCoy.

And that was another thing that disturbed him - why had the aliens allowed *him* to go free? They had simply left him there and taken Kirk away, when he had certainly been in no fit state to resist capture, even if they hadn't been so badly outnumbered. The illogic of everything that had happened grated against his Vulcan sensibilities.

Gathering his concentration as best he could, he began to search the area painstakingly - thinking would not profit him when he had so little data to work on. Perhaps he *would* find something. He deliberately suppressed the questions of what he would do when, and if, he found Kirk and McCoy - he would find an answer when he had to. Thinking seemed unaccountably difficult.

Unutterably distressed that his mind was so impaired as to hamper his attempt to rescue his friends, Spock nevertheless continued searching doggedly.

But he found nothing - no trace that anyone had passed by anywhere near at all, let alone any sign of a band of tall, heavy aliens dragging an unwilling, if apparently paralysed, Human with them. He could not understand it at all. What made it worse was that his head had begun to spin again - he didn't know whether he dreaded the loss of coherent thought or another memory blackout the more. Either would stop him helping Kirk. And he didn't even remember what had happened to McCoy, much less have any idea where to begin looking for them.

Nearer despair than he ever remembered being, Spock halted and looked about him. With something of a shock, he realised that he had been followed for some time - and hadn't noticed it until that moment. No surprise that his telepathic sensitivity wasn't functioning well - but it was just another item pointing to his ineffectiveness. He felt - useless

to his friends, and the weight of sorrow was...

No! This is wrong! His mind almost shouted aloud in its vehemence. *Control! Such thoughts are self-destructive and illogical, as well as unVulcan. I must control!*

Slowly the ingrained disciplines began to help, and his perception cleared to the point where he was aware that whatever had been following him was now concealing itself in a small copse of dark blue-green trees slightly ahead and to the left of him. He realised absently that the tricorder was missing; not that it would have helped him, malfunctioning as it had been, but mental disciplines or not, he could not stop it bothering him that he couldn't remember what had happened to it.

His concentration was slipping again; he could not afford to let it. Whatever watched him could be dangerous; probably was. Resolutely he began to walk forward with the purpose of making it show itself, not even sure if the action he was taking was the correct, logical one. But it was all he could think of, and the knowledge of the uncharacteristic ineffectiveness of his behaviour was a further blow to confidence at a critical moment.

Nearing the trees, Spock reeled suddenly as if he had walked into another force field. Yet this time he recognised his assailant. Waves of thought, strong and penetrating, reaching out towards him from the watcher. His telepathic abilities were apparently still functioning sufficiently for him to detect the threat.

Come no nearer! The unspoken command halted him in his tracks; it was too strong a power to disobey. Then the thought defined itself; a probing entity almost physical in its strength; a wishing to know; curiosity.

Show yourself - I do not threaten you. Spock didn't know from where he found the ability, but he sent the mental communication out, a hundred times more strongly than he had ever been able to broadcast telepathically before. The need to do it, perhaps - the wish to? In that moment he suddenly knew in his soul that the wishing had been the most important. He had to communicate with the aliens if he was to help his friends. It seemed strangely simple.

But he had not noticed any curiosity about the aliens before; only a silent, uncomprehending malice. And certainly he had received no impression of telepathic aura from them.

Nevertheless whatever watched him heard him. He felt its approach as an increase in the power beating on him. Then the source emerged from the small wood and came to stand in front of him, regarding him with amused, interested eyes that seemed more ancient than those of any living creature he had seen. It was certainly not related in any way to his friend's captors.

The sense of present power did not dissipate; and its origin was the small, animal-like being who crouched several feet in front of the Vulcan. With some surprise he decided that it vaguely resembled nothing so much as a tiny le-matya. Yet it displayed no ferocity, and he could not doubt its sentience and intelligence.

They stood and stared at each other, and he became aware that it was subtly questioning him; almost without his knowing it, and on a level far deeper than conscious thought. The impression he could not shake was that this was an important encounter; important to his mission, far more than finding the tall humanoids had ever been.

With an effort that seemed immense he forced himself to try and understand what the creature wanted to know from him. Although it had as yet made no real effort to harm him, he could sense the hidden menace it was capable of unleashing - if it was not satisfied with the answers to its questions.

Gradually he became aware that it wanted only to know what manner of being he was. How he thought, what he believed... He was answering from a part of him far deeper than thought or will. And one by one his answers were being accepted.

Vaguely he realised that he should find all this surprising; yet he did not. In an odd way he began to feel as if he should have expected it. Then without warning the examination was over, and miraculously the questioner appeared to be satisfied. The all-enveloping sense of power vanished, the creature made a small mewing sound - and vanished.

Spock was left standing there, looking at the empty place where it had been, and wondered if some type of transporter system had been operated. For a moment he stood there, considering the most logical course of action to take next. He could do nothing else but continue his search. With the intention of doing so, he moved off. But he had only walked a few paces when he felt the presence of the same questioning power again - once more he could not move, and before he could begin to formulate any idea of how to fight it, the alien transporter had operated again, and he found himself in darkness.

Spock woke; the confusion of his thought processes was affecting him again. It took several minutes of fierce concentration before he could think clearly enough to attempt to identify his surroundings. And when he did, it did not help him much.

He was lying on some hard surface; a floor, not a natural ground surface. It was cold, and he was in utter darkness. The atmosphere was fresh, but its smell was neither that of the recycled air of an enclosed life-support system nor that of a place which had access to the fresh air of a planet. He could see nothing, and was completely alone.

Rising, he found he was uninjured, though shaky; his balance was not all it might be. A quick, careful examination showed him he was in a hexagonal chamber whose floor and walls were made of the same smooth substance; again, he could not identify it. There did not appear to be any door, or any means of exit from the place. Though he could not see it, he had the impression that the ceiling was low.

That he was a prisoner was obvious; though of whom, and why, he had no idea. However, they must have a purpose for holding him, he reasoned, and sooner or later would make that purpose known to him. Resignedly, Spock sat down on the bare floor and struck up the pose of meditation. He would wait.

The Vulcan time sense was still not operating properly, and when eventually his light trance was sharply broken by a loud noise he had no concept of how much time had passed.

It was a loud, nerve-jangling noise, designed to shatter the composure of any Human. Fiercely he screened it out, thankful for the Vulcan heritage that made it possible, and stood to await whatever happened next.

One of the walls suddenly flooded with light; its whole became a huge viewscreen which showed a scene that struck terror to his heart. With an

effort he controlled it, and forced himself to watch helplessly, for he could not find any way to get to the subject the alien screen showed.

The tall, silent aliens were there, with both Jim Kirk and McCoy. Their pale, featureless faces seemed to transmit an aura of extreme cruelty even through the viewscreen as they tormented their two captives. It appeared to be a laboratory, filled with alien equipment whose like Spock had never yet encountered on any of his travels - though he could guess at most of its function. The beings were experimenting on his friends.

They were in pain, he knew it. He saw Kirk's face; it seemed to be appealing to him for help, and the sight cut through him to the soul. Just as he felt sure he would cry out, the screen went dark. Then it lit again, with a scene more dreadful than the last.

It was McCoy alone, his face distorted by some terrible disease. He made horrible whimpering sounds as if the power of speech had been taken from him. Just before the screen went out again, he clearly mouthed the single word, "Spock!"

It was then that the first clues fell into place in Spock's mind. If he had not been so badly affected by the mental distortion he would have seen it long ago. He was being put through some sort of test, no less important than the questioning the le-matya-like creature had put him through. Except that this was infinitely more horrific.

The scenes changed with sickening rapidity, each one showing either Jim Kirk or McCoy - or both of them - in varying forms of mortal peril. Several times they appealed to him, looking unerringly in the direction of the viewscreen, as if they knew he was there. Didn't they know he was helpless to do anything? He would give his life to save them - they both knew that.

The whole of what he had experienced since leaving the Enterprise seemed uncannily like a nightmare - though he had claimed often enough that Vulcans didn't dream (and Jim suspected how untrue that was in his case, he knew) - he had had them often enough to recognise the illogical, dreamlike quality of everything that had happened, or had appeared to happen. Though he did not believe he was in a dream of any kind at that moment, he realised that he could not be completely sure that all of what he saw was real.

And if he was being tested, what was the point? He could do nothing to help his friends. Were they merely testing his reactions to what he was shown?

Well, they would get none from him. With a stubbornness McCoy might have accused him of coming from his Human half, Spock resolutely sat down, cross-legged on the floor, his back turned to the screen, and concentrated fiercely on projecting his thoughts that he didn't believe any of what he was seeing to be real. He would do anything to help his friends if they were truly in danger, but since his captors would apparently not allow him to do so, then he would not co-operate. If they wanted to know any more from him, they would have to show themselves and ask him in person.

Almost immediately, thought-waves so powerful they almost physically knocked him over passed through him. But he held on, refusing with all his Vulcan will to have any thoughts at all save those he concentrated on broadcasting. For a few moments it fought him - then abruptly it stopped, almost like a switch being turned off. Spock sat, and waited.

In the opposite wall a door began to open; a narrow slit at first, as the blank wall slid slowly aside to reveal an opening, a narrow slit of a

light so intense he had to shield his eyes. It came to a halt when the light had grown to a distance of several metres across.

Spock stood and approached it. He had no way of knowing whether he was going towards yet another apparently illogical experience manufactured by the aliens for some unknown purpose - for now more than ever he was convinced he had been right to suspect that what he had been shown was not real - or whether he had indeed forced their hand and the open door was an invitation - or an order - to go and meet his captors in person.

The only answer was to go forward and find out. Spock deliberately walked towards the opening and went through.

He could remember the aliens dragging him away, and how he had somehow been unable to move - how he had tried to speak to Spock, to tell him to escape, save himself - but all he had been able to do was to move his mouth soundlessly, unable even to mouth the words properly. Then he had passed out - he must have. It was the only explanation for the blank in his memory afterwards.

He couldn't even distinctly remember the reason for their being there at all; he thought he recalled a distress signal - yes, that had been it; a distress signal from a newly discovered world. They had beamed down... Then it began to get confused. Memory - or the indistinct images he was having to make do with instead of it for the moment - told him that there had been the three of them and a security guard on the transporter pads. Then he got an image of himself, Spock and McCoy materialising on the planet's surface, alone. Just as he thought he was about to remember something really significant, something that would help, it all slipped away again, and he was left feeling that he couldn't even be sure if what he thought he had remembered had actually taken place at all.

Worse than that, he wasn't even certain if any of it was real. Most of the things he could recall happening had the odd, muddled quality of a dream. Yet he couldn't wake up, much as he had tried to. If only he could think straight, maybe he'd be able to work something out.

Yet if it was a dream, did he need to? He'd wake up eventually, and find himself back on the Enterprise. It *had* to be a dream, because none of it made sense.

Struggling to concentrate, he thought he remembered the three of them making their way across country, searching for something - the source of the distress signal? Then McCoy had disappeared - and he couldn't think how. All he could recall was the terrible sense of loss. Then the aliens had taken him away from Spock. Even without speech they had had no difficulty in relaying the mental impression to him that they had been doing him a favour - the Vulcan was about to walk into grave danger, and they were merely removing him from being caught up in it. His two friends had been taken from him - his worst nightmare come true. Didn't that have to prove it was all a dream? He didn't want it to be true!

They had taken him away to a place where short, stringy trees grew around a dark, evil-looking lake, and had tied him to one of the saplings with what he thought was a rope woven out of an unusual type of creeper. In an eerie silence they had stood about him in a circle, just staring at him without moving, and eventually he had understood that they were trying to make him frightened of something.

They were trying to make him frightened of the lake; of something that dwelled there. Apparently satisfied that he had got their meaning,

the beings moved off as one, without a sound. He had watched them go, not at all sorry that they were leaving him, and had carried on watching as they - he was sure he remembered it right this time - as they had simply disappeared from view; not as if a transporter had taken them but as if they had just climbed into an opening in the ground.

That had puzzled him - though now he couldn't see why he hadn't merely assumed that their civilisation was underground; they'd seen enough subterranean-dwelling peoples on their journeys though the galaxy, after all. Yet in that time and place it *had* puzzled him - and also it had not seemed odd to him that the rope which restrained him behaved so peculiarly.

It had not appeared to be tied very tightly, and he had been surprised when, after several minutes of struggling, he had not managed to free himself. Although the knots appeared simple - almost as if children had tied them - he just could not find out how to undo them, and the more he had tried to get out, the tighter they had become. That was when he first began to suspect that he was in a dream. But he could not afford to act as if he was in one, in case he was not - and there was the menace of the lake to contend with.

It lay there like a brooding monster with a life of its own, waiting. The aura of fear emanating from it seemed to grow - strange how it had appeared as merely an ordinary lake to him until the aliens had made him think otherwise.

The feeling grew, surrounding him as he sat there unable to escape. He began to wait, too, for surely something was going to happen. For long minutes he waited, watching the dark waters and trying to repel the sensation of soul-deep fear that was beginning to overpower him.

Then suddenly he was angry instead. If all this was real - and he still wasn't too sure about that - then the aliens, whoever or whatever they were, had taken him away from his friends; had somehow tampered with his mind so that he had been unable to help them or himself; and had taken away his communicator, making it impossible for him to contact the Enterprise. He wouldn't even dare to think that anything might be wrong with his ship; that way lay despair. But there hadn't been any search parties - or at least, none that had found him. Perhaps there had been, and they had found Spock and McCoy. That thought offered him some comfort - if only his friends were safely back on board ship!

He would find out - he *would*. Nothing and nobody, no matter what kind of powers and abilities they had, was going to stop him from finding out where Spock and McCoy were. And whoever had done this to him, had made him lose contact with his ship.

His anger swelled, and he glared at the lake as if it was responsible for his misfortunes. He would not be afraid of it - no matter what the aliens did to him, they would *not* succeed in making him afraid!

As if his resolution had been a signal, the surface of the lake rippled, as if an unknown menace was about to rise from its depths. Mentally he challenged it, with his anger and his courage, and his all-powerful indignation that they could do this to his friends and to his ship.

The lake waters boiled with fury - then they were still. With a loud snapping noise, his bonds broke themselves, and fell around him with a thud. In some crazy way he knew his challenge had set him free.

With dignity and determination he turned his back on the lake and walked away, without undue haste. If a refusal to be afraid was part of

the key to beating this place, then he had found a weapon.

He would make for the mountains that loomed on the horizon; as good a place to start his search for his friends as any in this barren, empty land. Whatever his frail hopes that they might have been rescued and taken back to the Enterprise had been while he had needed that hope to fight the fear the aliens had put on him, now he could admit to himself that in his heart he knew they were still prisoners. But he would find them.

Doggedly he set out for the blue-clad hills, still angry, but not afraid. Though he still could not totally clear the strange confusion from his mind, he knew that fear was not truly a part of his being.

It never had been.

That had been hours ago, and now he was laboriously climbing the foothills of the mountains, trying to figure out why it was that although hours had passed, night showed no sign of falling at all; even given a possible extended length to the planet's day, the orange sun still appeared to be in exactly the same place in the sky as it had been since before - since before the aliens had unceremoniously dragged him away as their prisoner. It was almost as if time stood still.

Out of breath, he stopped and looked around - and could hardly believe his eyes.

Sitting on a grassy hillock was none other than McCoy. He looked bewildered and lost - and dishevelled. Then he seemed to realise that he was being observed, and turned to face Kirk. The look of pure relief and joy that came to his features lifted a great deal of weariness and worry from the one who had searched for him.

"Jim! Thank god. I'd begun to think I was never going to see you or Spock or anyone again. Thank god!" he repeated. He stood, and swayed a little - the doctor looked completely exhausted to his friend's anxious eyes. Kirk went and made him sit down again, crouching before him, and smiled for the first time in - since he couldn't remember when. It felt like years ago that they'd beamed down to the planet.

"Bones - you don't know what a relief it is to find you," he said. "Then again - I guess you probably do. What happened to you? Are you okay?"

McCoy nodded wearily. "Yes - just tired. And confused. I haven't been able to think straight - something about this place... "

"I know." Kirk rose and sat beside the doctor. "I've had the same trouble myself. Wasn't sure if it was real."

"You too? Thought I was dreaming for a long while. After we got separated... I think I just got lost, but you know, I can't remember. I keep trying... "

"There's a lot I can't remember either," Kirk said grimly. "I'm not sure it isn't some planetary effect; though the sensors didn't detect anything unusual in the atmosphere. As far as I recall," he added wryly. McCoy grinned back; if they could joke about it, they had to be doing all right.

"I wandered around aimlessly for a long while; felt like days," McCoy went on, trying to piece it all together in his own mind as he tried to

make sense of it for Kirk. "Got stuck in a marsh - how I got out I'll never know. Then there was fog; and a sheer cliff I only discovered just in time. And all the while I had this feeling that something was following me. Something nasty... I was trying to find you and Spock, but I didn't know where to start looking. And I kept having memory blackouts. Then those aliens got me."

"Tall and thin, with no features?" Kirk asked. He saw by the look on McCoy's face that he had been captured by the same beings.

"That's them. You've seen them? Gave me the creeps. Just appeared from nowhere and dragged me off with them. I couldn't keep up, and they got angry. Trouble with being captured by telepaths is they can think fear at you and chill your marrow by just thinking. Then suddenly you two were there, held prisoner too. And there was an injured alien lying there at your feet. One of *them*, and it was dying."

"Go on," Kirk said gently. McCoy had faltered, and Kirk could see that the recounting of his tale was distressing the doctor deeply. McCoy might be all right, but he wasn't totally himself. *Neither am I, for that matter.* It was the damned planet doing it to them, he was sure.

McCoy swallowed, and continued. "I found I had my medikit, although I thought I'd lost it. Suddenly I knew I was being given a choice; either I could take you two with me, and escape - or I could treat the alien and save its life. And... I didn't know what to do. I seemed to know that if I chose to save its life, they'd take you and Spock away again, and I'd be in the same position as I was before; maybe with even less chance of finding you again. But I also knew that I had to choose right, or else everything would be lost. I wanted us all to escape, Jim. But I couldn't let it die."

By now Kirk had begun to understand what was upsetting McCoy. "So you saved it. And you felt disloyal to us."

McCoy nodded. "I felt I should have tried to help the three of us; should have gone - left the alien. Even if we didn't have a chance of escaping; I still should have tried. But I couldn't let it die!" he repeated, and looked at Kirk miserably.

"You did the right thing, Bones - I would have done the same thing in your position." Kirk smiled reassuringly at his friend, hoping inside that in McCoy's place he would indeed have had the courage to have done what was right.

"Thanks," said McCoy. "I needed to hear that. Anyway - it wasn't real; at least, you weren't. As soon as I treated the alien, you and Spock disappeared. Faded out; and I knew it wasn't a transporter. Then the aliens just walked off and left me. I got the feeling that I'd passed some kind of test.

"I'm beginning to think we've both been tested, Bones," Kirk said grimly, "and so far, we seem to have done okay. But I wonder - if that's the case, what sort of test are they putting Spock through? If I found you, then maybe we can find him; and I know we have to try."

Suddenly looking a good deal better, as if a weight had been lifted from him, McCoy stood. "Then we'd better make a start. And there is one thing in our favour."

"What's that?"

"Although I thought I'd seen you and Spock, there was something...

wrong. This time, I *know* you're real."

Spock walked through the labyrinth of passages, following the lights that appeared to be leading him. Everything would go dark around him, then a few feet away a concealed light would come on, clearly indicating the way he was supposed to tread. Several times at a particularly complicated junction of passages, he had been left in the dark for some minutes. But each time he had patiently waited until the next pool of illumination had appeared. If he was being tested, then whatever was testing him would learn that a Vulcan did not, under any circumstances, display impatience. Eventually, at yet another junction, he was left in utter darkness for a long time. With some satisfaction he noted that his innate time sense was operating again. He knew instinctively that he had been in the dark for twenty point five three standard minutes. Adopting his earlier strategy, he sat, cross-legged, and attained the first level of meditation. Whatever reaction his captors expected, he was quite certain that it would not be that one.

And he was right. He had only to wait another four minutes before he felt the sensation of an alien transporter begin to operate. Almost simultaneously he found himself in the same cross-legged pose, sitting on the floor of a large, well-lit room filled with alien artifacts.

There in the centre of the room, unshielded now, was the source of the power he had felt from the le-matya. It awed him in its intensity; but he refused to be subservient. Rising with dignity, he approached the humanoid figure seated on what looked like an ornately-carved throne and stood calmly before it. Then he carefully and deliberately raised his eyebrow in an expression of reserved interest. He would not be intimidated.

"Welcome, Spock of Vulcan - welcome indeed. You have proved a great source of interest to me. It is longer than you can imagine since I have been surprised."

The alien's voice was soft and friendly-sounding. Yet Spock was not fooled; this being was dangerous. In what way exactly he was not yet certain. But he would have to tread carefully; instinct told him that any chance he, Kirk and McCoy had of escaping from this place depended on it.

"I perceive your thought - although you shield well for one of so young a race." The alien was smiling now. "Yes, I am dangerous - very dangerous, in that I have the power of life and death over you and your companions. And over much more besides - as you have begun to suspect."

"Where are my companions; and what is your purpose in submitting us to these tests?" Spock asked with all the patience his Vulcan soul could muster.

"Ah - the tests. You and your friends are the first to pass them - or at least, all those I have set so far. It is eons since travellers last set foot on my world. And I must tell you that none who landed here have ever been permitted to leave - as yet." Now the soft voice held a veiled menace; even so, Spock sensed regret. Regret for what the alien felt it had to do to them. For the first time Spock realised that although the being before him looked Human, he could not tell if it was male or female.

"You are indeed very perceptive," said the being. "Good - I am pleased. Perhaps after all you do have a chance. But only that - a small chance. I believe I owe it to you to explain several things. This you have earned."

"The mental confusion I placed upon you was necessary; your actions had to come from what you term the subconscious, so that they would be your true reactions; not calculated by the intellect, but coming from the soul. That you were able to understand the unreality of the scenes you were shown speaks much for your intelligence. It was that which decided me to bring you here."

"But some of it was real." It was not a question; Spock was suddenly beginning to understand much of what had happened, and also knew that his captor was communicating on a telepathic level as well as verbally.

"Yes - in some of those tests you and the ones named Kirk and McCoy could have been killed. Had you been, it would merely have proved that you were not worthy of reaching this stage. You will also note that your mind is now clear. You have earned that advantage."

"For the final test?" Spock didn't really need to ask.

"For the final test. For that I must bring the other two here. Before I do, I will permit you to ask me any questions you wish. I may answer some of them."

Any information he gained now might prove of vital importance. Spock phrased his questions very carefully. "You are alone here?"

The alien laughed; a soft noise, yet filled with menace. "You are indeed clever. Several questions in one. That one also meant 'what are you?', did it not? Very well. Yes, I am alone here, and have been for countless years of your kind. Those who took Kirk are servants of my own creation. Androids might be the nearest thing in your vocabulary; yet they are in truth much more. But they do not have souls of their own. As to what I am - that is more difficult to describe. My race is old beyond your imagination; old - and highly evolved. I am the only one of my kind in this part of the universe. Where the others dwell I shall not say. But be warned - my power is also beyond your imagination."

Spock took the unspoken meaning. It was important to both the Vulcan and Terran peoples - as well as to the whole Federation - that they should pass whatever the final test might be. He felt the power before him, and knew that the boast was not without substance. Clearly the alien did not share the Organians' morals regarding non-violence. They would have to prove to it that they, and their races, were worthy of continued existence.

"Yes, Spock of Vulcan," spoke the alien. "You understand my purpose clearly. I have waited long ages for such an encounter as this; those who came here before were not sufficiently evolved for me to make a judgement, although they had achieved space travel. But you and your friends are; you have proved that by passing the first tests."

"And if we fail the final one?" Spock had to ask it, although on this occasion his Vulcan curiosity didn't really want to know the answer.

"Your Federation will cease to exist. If you succeed, then I shall leave here, and travel on to another part of the universe to continue with my task. In ages to come, other civilisations in other galaxies will advance sufficiently for me to make a judgement."

Knowing he dared not suggest to his captor that it was wrong to interfere with other species' evolution - he was beginning to suspect that, powerful as it might be, the alien was morally and psychologically unbalanced, and was desperately trying to shield lest the being should catch his thought - Spock stood there quietly and tried to think what else he should ask it while he had the chance.

"One more question I will permit." The alien was beginning to sound impatient.

"What were you testing for - and what will the final test be?" The Vulcan hoped he had asked the question which would gain him the most information.

"That is two questions." The alien now sounded more amused than annoyed - but the menace was still there. "The first one only I will answer. In those tests which you and your companions have already passed, I was testing - as you have partly surmised, my surprising visitor - for those things which mark the level of advancement of a people; and their worthiness to continue evolving. Intelligence, perception, compassion, friendship; and the willingness to sacrifice oneself for one's friends if necessary. Determination, a refusal of despair, courage - especially courage; and persistence. The will to do what is right. Mercy - even for an enemy. All of these things, and more. But as to the final test - that is for you to discover, as your actions must not be predetermined by anything I might tell you. And now it is time to welcome the other players."

The alien made no action, gave no sign; yet almost immediately a shimmer appeared in the chamber almost next to Spock. Then it was gone, and standing beside him were Kirk and McCoy. The real ones; of that he was instinctively certain. Both looked tired and dishevelled; but much of the weariness seemed to drop from them as they saw Spock, and glad smiles lit up both their faces.

"Spock - you're okay." The relief in Kirk's voice spoke volumes. McCoy said nothing - he just grinned. For once he couldn't find any words.

Before Spock could make any answer, the alien spoke again. "All are now together. The scene for the final act is almost set. I will allow you a few of your minutes to prepare." Then the shimmer came again, and it was gone, leaving the three of them alone in the chamber.

"Well," said McCoy. "What was that all about?"

So Spock explained - or at least explained all he knew or suspected. Comparing their various experiences confirmed much of what the Vulcan had learned. None of them could think in what form exactly the final test would be - except that in some way it would almost certainly be designed to test yet another quality of their species. But what quality? At least they did now have the slight advantage that all their minds finally seemed to be clear. The alien had apparently thought they had all earned that.

Kirk wanted to be angry - had every right to be - but he knew that he had no time to waste on such an emotion; Spock's way had to be followed here. None of them could afford to allow anything to distract them from their concentration if they were to have any hope of passing whatever sort of final obstacle the alien planned to set before them. Yet his anger at what had been done to them was close to the surface - he controlled it with difficulty. McCoy, too - and Spock sensed how they felt. But the Vulcan had no fears that they would allow their emotions to get in the way; for all that he said about Human emotion, still he knew that these two particular Humans were capable of very rigid control should it prove necessary - even McCoy.

"So you don't think this alien is showing itself to us in its true form, Spock?" asked Kirk. "Like the Organians."

"I am almost certain of that, Jim." The Vulcan replied thoughtfully, knowing that it was imperative they spend whatever short space of time they

had left before their inquisitor returned in assimilating what evidence they had about its nature. It might not help them - but there again it might. "It is a being too far advanced for the need for any physical form; I believe it shows itself to us in a way it believes we can relate to. But it does not possess the Organians' benevolence. We are dealing with a great power; and one that may not be entirely sane by our standards."

"I hope it didn't hear you say that, Spock," said McCoy, looking round him nervously, half-expecting the alien to reappear at any second. "And don't worry - I don't plan to underestimate it. I may be angry - but I'm plain terrified as well!"

"I didn't really get much chance to look at it before it disappeared, Spock," said Kirk. "You say it appeared Human, but neither male nor female, and you couldn't tell its age? I... "

Whatever Kirk had been about to say was cut off by the return of the alien. They did not notice any preceding shimmer this time; but suddenly it was there, seated on its throne and regarding them with an expression a mad biologist might have worn when about to examine a new, inferior species.

"The time has come," it announced with authority. "The one called Spock has informed you of what is at stake. The final test concerns a decision you must make. I am about to offer you a choice - and I suggest you choose wisely. You have all proved you possess the capability to sacrifice yourselves for a friend if necessary. But to sacrifice yourself for someone you care deeply about is far easier than to do such a thing for someone or something you are not quite so personally involved with. This choice I offer you - your safety, or that of the Federation and its worlds. If you choose your own safety, then I will allow you to live out the rest of your lives here - I shall leave, but I shall leave you all you need to survive quite comfortably - and I shall give you a far greater life span. But I will totally destroy your Federation. Or you can choose to die - here and now - and I will still leave, and permit those worlds to continue their existence unhindered. Choose now - and I will have your answers quickly."

Spock and McCoy both turned to look at Kirk; by unspoken agreement they indicated their willingness to follow him in this, as in everything. Both knew that there was only one decision to be made, and that Kirk would make it. Spock was even mildly surprised that a being so apparently advanced as their captor would not perceive how simple a decision it would be for all of them. None of them wanted to die - but they had no real choice. The Vulcan and the Doctor stood quietly and waited for their Captain to speak the words that would save the Federation - at whatever cost to themselves. It had to be done. And at least they would die together.

Kirk nodded grimly to both of his friends. There was no need for words between them now - they all knew what passed through the others' minds. He turned back to face the waiting alien.

"Does the safety of the Federation include that of the Enterprise?" he asked. They had no way of knowing if the alien would keep its word no matter what he decided - but that was a question that he had to ask.

"It does," replied the alien, its face expressionless. Nevertheless they could all sense the waves of expectancy it generated.

"Then," said Kirk, in a tone of determination Spock and McCoy recognised very well, "there is only one answer I can make. We could never - not for an instant - think of saving ourselves at such a cost. It would

go against everything we have always believed in and worked for. We will sacrifice ourselves; let the Federation worlds - and the Enterprise - go unharmed."

The alien was expressionless no longer - it was clearly amazed. For a moment it seemed at a loss for what to say. Then it appeared to gather its power around it, as if to remind them of what manner of being they faced.

"You have surprised me greatly," it said. "I had not expected the decision to be so easy for you to make. And I tell you this - you have made the correct one. You have not disappointed me - it is clear that species such as yours should be allowed to continue. Therefore I shall keep my word as to their safety - of that you need have no fears. In a few moments I shall leave this galaxy - and you will find that you have earned more than you thought. And perhaps in time I will find that I have learned something also - for the first time in eons. You have shown me what true mercy means."

Suddenly they were alone on the windswept surface of the planet; the chamber, the alien, and all traces of its presence were gone. A familiar bleeping noise broke the moment, and Kirk flipped open the communicator which had inexplicably appeared on his belt. Montgomery Scott's anxious voice filled the air.

"Kirk to Enterprise," said an extremely shaken Starship Captain. "Scotty, you don't know how good it is to hear you. Somehow we all seem to be okay. Three to beam up - and quickly. Prepare to leave orbit as soon as we arrive. Kirk out."

"It's let us go." McCoy sounded stunned.

"Indeed, Doctor," said Spock. "And I am as surprised as you. Evidently we did succeed in teaching it something."

"But what about the Federation?" McCoy still couldn't quite believe that they were safe after all. "Will it keep its word about that?"

"Somehow," said Kirk thoughtfully, "I think it will. And we'll just have to hope that wherever it's gone, it has learned what mercy really means. We've shown it the way - and all because we knew we had to do what was right."

While their minds were filled with thoughts of what they had incredibly managed to do, what they had saved, the Enterprise transporter took them.

On the surface of the now-uninhabited planet, the wind whistled. The universe was still unfolding as it should.



In the Midst of our Crisis

Is it fear which keeps you apart?
And is it fear which prevents you
From caring about me, as I care about you?
Or *do* you care?
Is that why you are afraid?
It must be fear
Which has caused you to take this step.
A request for transfer? You?!

I feel guilt because you must have sensed
What is in my heart - and which I tried to hide.
If you do leave I have only myself to blame.

But... No time for decisions now.
Another mission, another planetfall,
Another land so alike Earth,
And you *are* at my side once more.
Later, I wished that you hadn't been.
That disease could have claimed us all.
We were all fearful,
For ourselves - but more so for each other.

What was it that happened down there
To really make you change your mind?
What was it that helped you meet my eyes
In the midst of our crisis
And tell me that you *did* want to go back to the ship?
Few words which said it all.
And it mattered not why -
Only that you did.

(Inspired by *MIRI*)

KAREN HAYDEN

